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Thucydides

A Study in Historical Reality

G. F. Abbott



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THUCYDIDES

A Study in Historical Reality

BY
G. F. ABBOTT

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PREFACE

The estimate of Thucydides, as of every other great historian, has varied at different periods and with different readers : being affected sometimes by those political prejudices which arise from the conflict of parties, and sometimes by—to borrow Professor Bury's trenchant phrase—"those cloistral inanities which flourish, preposterous and unashamed, in the congenial air of universities." Sober and enlightened appreciation has never been wanting ; but seldom has it been based upon direct experience of conditions analogous to those in which he wrote.

It was under such conditions—during the late War—that I renewed my acquaintance with his work ; and the peculiar applicability of its contents to our own actual circumstances made many things real which formerly seemed unreal—yesterday and to-day appeared to meet in his pages and to illumine each other. The thought then came that a clear and concise presentation of a writer who deals in so masterly a fashion with foreign policy and democracy, imperialism and the struggle for power, might be of interest, perhaps even of practical use, at a time when such problems engage more than ever public attention.

Upon the military side of the history I have said little, for I am not a soldier. But all other aspects

are, I believe, treated at a length adequate to the end in view : to place the modern reader in a position to regard Thucydides' work not as the production of a remote world and exotic habits of mind, but as an object instinct with present life and reality.

My little essay is not a contribution to learning, but only, in some measure, to understanding. Therefore, I have not thought fit to overload it with an erudite apparatus which experts would find superfluous and laymen tedious. Verbal questions—unfortunately unavoidable—are not given undue prominence : there is now a class of readers who put more searching questions to antiquity than can be answered by mere note-learning, and to such the present work is addressed.

Again, in writing of an author who has been so often discussed for so many centuries it would be difficult to avoid reference to other students' opinions. I hope, however, that in this matter also the proper limits are not exceeded. Much, doubtless, of what scholars, great and small, have written is very valuable, and I have profited by it ; but that does not prevent me from urging those who desire a real acquaintance with the subject to go direct to the fountain-head—to take for their principal instructor in Thucydides Thucydides himself—rather than trust any interpreter. If my essay does nothing more than inspire such a desire, I shall be well content.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

What we know of the life of Thucydides can be summed up very briefly. During the Peloponnesian War, 431-404 B.C., which he outlived, he was, in his own words, "of an age to apprehend" (V. 26) : whence we may infer that he was born about the year 460 B.C.¹ The unfinished condition of his work leads us to surmise that he died not very long after the end of the war—say, in round figures, about 400 B.C. From some incidental allusions to himself, we gather that his birth was noble and his wealth considerable. His father's name, Oloros, suggests descent from the Thracian king whose daughter Miltiades had married : and perhaps this accounts for the fact (if it is a fact) that his tomb, or cenotaph, might be seen among the graves of the Miltiades family. We also have it on his own authority that

¹ The tradition that he was forty in 431 B.C. appears to be but another inference from this vague statement. But *αισθανόμενος τῇ ἡλικίᾳ* does not necessarily imply forty. The Greeks commonly reckoned *ἡλικία*—in the sense of *ἀκμή*, "the prime of life"—from about 17 to 45, though Plato preferred the period from 25 to 55 (*Rep.* 460). On the whole, thirty years would seem a reasonable allowance.

he possessed the right of working gold mines in Thrace, and consequently great influence in that country (IV. 104-5). Two more autobiographical statements supply the only authentic episodes which break the blank of his career. He suffered from the plague which visited Athens in 430 B.C.; and in 424 he met with another misfortune. While in command of an Athenian squadron off the Thracian coast, he was summoned to the relief of Amphipolis, a few miles up country on the Strymon. He set sail in all haste with the seven ships at his disposal; but just before he got there the city had capitulated. Thucydides, however, managed to save Eion, at the mouth of the river, forestalling the enemy by a night and repelling his attacks (IV. 104-7). According to this account, the historian did everything possible under the circumstances. But the Athenians saw the matter in a different light: "It befell me," he says, "to be an exile from my country for twenty years" (V. 26). And that is all.¹ For the rest, we have his book.

¹ All other data relating to Thucydides' life (derived from Plutarch, Pausanias, and especially from two Greek essays, one bearing the name of Marcellinus, the other anonymous) are mere assertions differing only in degree of probability—or absurdity. They are the sort of confused and contradictory stories which always and naturally spring up in the absence of any contemporary record. Some of them may be true, but we have no means of distinguishing them from the false. The efforts made, chiefly in Germany, to utilise this material for biographical purposes have proved a waste of labour. Hardly one of the painfully gathered stones, from which a solid building is meant to be erected, but crumbles into dust at the first breath of criticism.

In reading that book we are on firm and fruitful ground. No facts of personal history would have added anything vital to the knowledge of the man's mind which we derive from its pages. Had Thucydides deliberately proposed to leave us an image of his mental character, he could not have succeeded better. But his purpose was quite other.

He tells us that he set to work as soon as the Peloponnesian War broke out, because he expected it to prove, as it did, the most momentous upheaval (without excepting even the Persian invasion) in Greek experience up to his time. It is not, however, the magnitude of the event that constitutes its chief claim to our attention. If Thucydides' History contains lessons of universal import; if it has created habits of thought and modes of reasoning which abide with us—this, doubtless, is primarily due to the depth of insight and breadth of grasp with which the historian has treated his subject. But the subject itself by its character has contributed not a little to the result. When Thucydides expressed the hope that his book might be found "useful" as a study, not only "of the events which have happened," but also "of the like events which, according to the way of human things, will happen again in the future" (I. 22), he spoke even more prophetically than he knew.

Thrice has modern Europe been rent by a conflict

in essence similar to the Peloponnesian War. Once from 1689 to 1712, again from 1798 to 1815, and again in our own day. The cause of all these struggles might, after changing the names, be summed up in Thucydides' phrase : " the growth of the Athenian power which alarmed the Lacedaemonians and forced them into war " (I. 23). For, like the France of Louis XIV. and of Napoleon, like the Germany of Wilhelm II., the Athens of Pericles did not rest content an equal among equals. She aspired to be more than a Greek Power : she would be *the* Greek Power. All other states were to cower before her and minister with submissive awe to her greatness. Against this overweening ambition the other Greek states rose—in obedience to the instinct of self-preservation and in accordance with the perennial principle of foreign policy called nowadays " balance of power " ¹—a situation in which no single state is allowed to acquire absolute predominance over the others and to impose its will upon them. They rose under the leadership of Lacedaemon, who entered the war with a manifesto whereby she proclaimed herself the liberator of Greece (II. 8), precisely as England on the occasions

¹ The question whether the *idea* of the balance of power or whether the *phrase* only has a modern origin was settled long ago by David Hume who notes : " In all the politics of Greece, the anxiety with regard to the balance of power is apparent, and is expressly pointed out to us even by the ancient historians. Thucydides represents the league which was formed against Athens, and which produced the Peloponnesian war, as entirely owing to this principle."—Essay XXIX, *Of the Balance of Power*.

mentioned proclaimed herself the liberator of Europe, not so much from concern for the liberties of the weaker states as because the subjection of the weaker states was a menace to her own safety.

At first sight this may seem comparing molehills to mountains. But the difference is only one of scale. Ancient Greece presented in miniature a world politically analogous to modern Europe—a number of sovereign states whose conflicting interests admitted of merely temporary diplomatic combinations ; and the ambition entertained by Athens may, without misuse of language, be described as an attempt at world dominion. Some observers to-day view that attempt in the dry light of pure reason and speak contemptuously of the “parochial” spirit which prevented the other Greek states from acquiescing in Athenian aspirations. Whether it might not have been better for Greece as a whole, had they done so, is beside the point. The point is that they preferred their parochial independence in the same way as the states of modern Europe have done on each of the occasions named, and for the defence of that independence they had recourse to similar means. It is not impossible that the student of two thousand years hence may see these European struggles between universal and local aspirations in a similar light. But this also is beside the point.

The analogy goes further. In their mutual relations the Greek states acknowledged an international

law, and to settle their differences by an appeal to its principles, before appealing to arms, was held the proper course (I. 28, 29, 34, 140, 145). But in practice they evinced as little willingness to submit disputes to judicial settlement or arbitration as we do; the very machinery of the Amphietyonic Council, an equivalent in essence of our League of Nations, which aimed at restraining and punishing aggression, being only employed when it could be made subservient to the views of one of the leading powers.

Nor will the disparity of the numbers engaged in the respective conflicts, or the engines employed in them, obscure the essential likeness to anyone who perceives that those boasted numbers and engines are superficial differences and, being the same for both sides, do not affect the result any more than the raising or the lowering of the two terms of a vulgar fraction.

The ancient historian had a shrewd perception of this truth when he foresaw that history would repeat itself; and the modern historical student has proof of it in the repetitions of history known to him: those repetitions but for which the study of history would be as idle a pastime as a perusal of the *Arabian Nights*. As things are, no study is more profitable, because, while informing us of what was done by other people in former ages, it instructs us what to do, or not to do, in the like cases in our

own. The use of history, it may be said, is to light the present hour to its duty. These praises and exhortations were already platitudes in the day of Polybius. But since they have been questioned, with much else, in our busy times, it may be worth while to dwell upon them somewhat.

The extent to which we can draw from the history of the past useful lessons for guidance in the present obviously depends on the degree of knowledge and judgment we bring to the comparative study of the past and the present. If we are to avoid the pitfall of false analogies (historical parallels are admittedly as dangerous as they are tempting), we must be certain, in each case, that we are in possession of all the essential facts and that we see them in their true proportions and relations—never an easy and often an impossible stipulation ; for the true origin and course of human events are seldom susceptible of that kind of evidence which can compel our absolute belief. But the difficulty of arriving at certainty does not warrant the “ practical man ” in dismissing all consideration of past events as useless, on the ground that his age is so different from former ages that past experience is inapplicable to it ; that circumstances have changed and things no longer are what they were. This is simply confusing externals with fundamentals. Fundamentally things have not changed—indeed, cannot change except in details “ while,” to quote another pregnant

phrase of Thucydides, "human nature remains the same" (III. 82). The life of mankind is made up of a few great points, which steadily reappear; for human actions are governed by laws as fixed and regular as those which rule in the physical world. Thus the effects upon public morality which accompanied the Plague at Athens in 430 B.C. reappeared during the prevalence of the "Black Death" in Italy in 1348 A.D., and the French Revolution reproduced only too faithfully the excesses of the Corcyraean Sedition—despite the "magi of the day", who pronounced such events impossible in "so philosophical an age."¹ The list might be extended indefinitely. But it hardly needs a catalogue to support a platitude.

Academic philosophers, possessed of leisure, may indulge in ingenious endeavours to demonstrate the dependence of all events on the age and culture to which they belong—they may even push their passion for non-human factors in history so far as almost to forget that history deals with the lives of nations and that nations are groups of human beings. It would be absurd, of course, to overlook the influences of time and of condition; but it is equally absurd to overrate them. The key to a particular age may be this, or that, or the other, as rival professors decide; the key to all ages is—the nature of man. And those writers who, like

¹ See Coleridge's *The Statesman's Manual*, p. 14.

Thucydides, have assumed a virtual sameness in human nature have struck a note of interpretation as true as it is simple : so true that it will probably outlast all the historical evolutionary doctrines elaborated during the nineteenth century.

Not the least of the many lessons that are brought home to the reader of Thucydides—and the best apology for a rather lengthy homily—is this very sameness of human nature : every page of his work bears witness to it ; and the author himself in his outlook appears before us as a startling incarnation of that recurrent phase in the history of the human mind which we are pleased to call the “ modern spirit.”

CHAPTER II

THE MODERN SPIRIT

When I say that Thucydides incarnates the modern spirit, I must hasten to explain, I use the phrase with one important reservation. They who may look to him for any ambitious theories will be sadly disappointed. There is nothing arbitrary or speculative in the work of Thucydides; it may almost be said that there is nothing in literature which shows so austere a respect for reality. He was keen and bold in his thought. But he rises beyond his own originality, and cares always more for truth than for novelty. With this qualification, he is a modern of the moderns.

The difference of the work of Thucydides from that of Herodotus may serve, as it has often done, to measure the degree in which the former belongs to us. A wider gulf can hardly be imagined than that fixed between the mentality of the one and the other. Herodotus has been called the "Father of History"; in truth, he is only the father of story-telling: the first and most lively of our special correspondents. Thucydides has laid the foundations of serious historical writing: "The

first page of Thucydides is," as Hume most justly observed, "the commencement of real history." The two are so far apart that scholars have sometimes found it hard to realise that they wrote in the same period and for the same people.

Herodotus had no conception of natural law as applying to human action. He makes Xerxes justify his imperialism by reference to a "law," which, says the King, "I shall not be the first to lay down, but shall act upon, having found it." This expression "law" (*νόμος*), in Herodotus, turns out to mean at last, not a necessity common to mankind in general, but a national tradition—a habit of conquest hereditary among the Persians, which seemed to the pious monarch to enjoy divine sanction because it paid (VII. 8). This is Herodotus, a raconteur pure and simple.

Thucydides, by chance or by design, uses a formula where the similarity of the wording serves only to accentuate the difference in the thought: "Of men we know that always by a necessity of nature (*ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκῆς*)¹ wherever they are the stronger, they will dominate. We neither laid down this law (*νόμον*), nor were the first to act upon it; but having found it already in being, and about to leave it in being for ever, we only avail ourselves of it; knowing that both you and other

¹ *ἀνάγκη*, necessity, as a law of nature. Plat. *Phaed.* 98; Xen. *Mem.* I. i. 11. Cp. *τὰς φυσικὰς ἀνάγκας*, Plut. *Nikias*, XXIII.

men, if raised to the same power, would do as we do " (V. 105). In this remarkable passage Thucydides, through the mouth of the envoys of the Athenian Empire, has called attention to the cynical principle which still governs the conduct of states—not as an individual idiosyncrasy, but as a universal law.¹ It is only one of the traits which differentiate him from his famous predecessor and bring him into line with modern realists.

Everyone knows Herodotus' childlike weakness for portents and prodigies, dreams, miracles and oracles, his naive acceptance of the divine as a factor in human affairs. Thucydides is the very antithesis of all this. He admits religion into his scheme—the scheme would not be complete without it; but he admits it only as a matter of fact, not as a matter of his own faith.

On the eve of the War we have the customary application to the god at Delphi, and—"as is said"—his enthusiastic response to the Lacedaemonians that "he himself would take part with them in it, whether invited or not" (I. 118). This oracle calls for no comment. But when the removal of the country folk into Athens led to the occupation

¹ Likewise in Plato's *Gorgias*, 484, Callicles justifies Persian imperialism as being *κατὰ νόμον γε τὸν τῆς φύσεως*—τὸν κρείττω τοῦ ἥττονος ἄρχειν—and includes in this "law of nature" not only "all the states and races of men," but also "the other animals," while Thucydides is thinking more particularly of "human nature" (*ἀνθρωπεῖα φύσει*—I. 76). Dionysius of Halicarnassus expressed the same thought in similar terms.—*Ant. Rom.* I. v.

of every inch of vacant space, including even a banned spot which, a Pythian oracle had declared, was better unoccupied, "To my mind," remarks the historian, "the oracle came true in the contrary way to what they supposed; for it was not the unlawful occupation which caused the calamities, but the war caused the necessity of the occupation," and he rationalises the oracle as a shrewd forecast that, if the forbidden place were ever inhabited, it would be so under some dire stress (II. 17). Another ancient prophecy is more amusingly an instrument of the author's exegetic purpose: "There shall come a Dorian war," it ran, "and with it a . . ." something which might be either *loimos* (a plague) or *limos* (a famine)—opinions were divided about the correct version. Now, as the war was accompanied by a plague, naturally the argument in favour of *loimos* prevailed. "But," says Thucydides, "if ever in the future another Dorian war arises which happens to be accompanied by a famine, I suppose they will recite the verse accordingly" (II. 54). In explaining these oracles, the author exposes them.

Similarly, he finds nothing supernatural in earthquakes and eclipses. But as these things were generally believed to be signs and, as such, became springs of human action or inaction, he notes them (I. 23; II. 8; III. 89; IV. 52; V. 45, 50; VIII. 6)—particularly an eclipse of the moon which occurred

at a critical moment in the Sicilian campaign and had a disastrous effect upon it. Thucydides records the phenomenon not as a presage of the disaster : the eclipse contributed to it because the men, superstition-struck, would not embark, and their general himself had an undue leaning towards "divination and matters of that sort " (VII. 50). He chronicles omens and oracles much as an Englishman of the present day would in describing some country—say Burma—still addicted to "matters of that sort," or, not to go so far afield, as a chronicler of the Great War might write of the Angels of Mons and of the diviners who sought, and found, in the Bible prophetic references to Armageddon : if he thought that these matters, by raising people's hopes and fears, exercised any influence on the course of events.

A serious writer, needless to say, would not think it worth his while to add that he considered every-one of these things a piece of silly superstition. Neither does Thucydides. Human unreason, in the flesh, was no doubt trying. He cannot quite conceal his irritation with "those who obstinately maintained opinions based on prophecies " (V. 26). But, in writing, his attitude towards his neighbours' mental infirmities is a pattern of good sense and good taste. Where a lesser sceptic would sneer, he only smiles, and he never stoops to scoff. It would be as great a mistake to think of Thucydides as an

iconoclast as to think of him as a conformer. He is too thorough a rationalist for either. It is in no polemical spirit that he even mentions, among the symptoms of the excitement stirred up by the War, the briskness of soothsayers and strolling oracle-mongers (II. 8, 21), alive though he is to their pernicious influence (V. 103; VIII. 1).¹ And when he comes to such grave matters as the "curses" and "taints" with which each side charged the other on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities (I. 126 foll.), he treats them with a solemnity which seems to spring from a deeper scepticism than the levity of most professed unbelievers in all times.

Thucydides does not write to attack vulgar errors. But his forbearance implies contempt rather than sympathy; it is part of the intellectual aristocrat's exclusiveness—of that profound realisation that the crowd will always think and act according to its kind.

As for the common belief that the righteous prosper, or at least do not utterly perish, not being borne out by experience, it does not commend itself to the mind of Thucydides. During the plague the good and the bad all perished alike—nay, those who braved the danger and visited the sick were

¹ Were Thucydides fond of explicit judgments, he might have summed up his position on prophecies and the like thus: "My judgment is that they ought all to be despised; . . . Though when I say despised, I mean it as for belief: for otherwise the spreading or publishing of them is in no sort to be despised. For they have done much mischief."—Bacon's *Essay Of Prophecies*.

spared less than those who basely deserted them. (II. 51). He makes Nikias try to encourage himself and his wretched soldiers with the reflection that their calamities are undeserved : " My days have been passed in devotion towards the gods and justice towards men " (VII. 77). Could so virtuous a life come to a miserable end ? Alas ! Thucydides pointedly notes, it did (VII. 86). Nikias goes on to argue that their enemies had had their full share of success, and, if the expedition had provoked the jealousy of any god, by that time the Athenians had been punished enough, and might therefore begin to hope that the gods would be more merciful to them ; since they now invited divine pity rather than jealousy (VII. 77). In view of the event, this pious argument sounds almost like a sardonic comment on Herodotus' favourite doctrine (clear proof of which he discovers round every corner) that the gods are jealous of human prosperity, loving always to strike down what is highest.

Thucydides' own attitude towards the gods is that of a well-poised agnostic : If there be any, they do not concern themselves with human affairs. Therefore he never obtrudes divine agencies in his story, but seeks all the causes of human vicissitudes exclusively within the circle of humanity. In the busy brain of man he finds the rules by which the whole empire of matter is worked. But the powers of that brain are not illimitable. Its best laid plans

may at any moment be derided by the opposition of forces beyond its foresight. The impossibility of foreseeing everything keeps the chapter of accidents always open, and often gives chance the last word ; and if this is the case in peace, still more is it true of war. Like all thoughtful soldiers, Thucydides nourishes a regard for luck which, warm as it is, has less of hope in it than of fear—and nothing of reverence.

On this point also he presents an illuminating contrast to Herodotus. To the latter " chance " is a force worked by God—a form of divine intervention (*θελη τύχη*, IV. 8, answering to the *forte quadam divinitus* of Livy, I. 4). Thucydides means by " chance " just what we mean : " We are wont to impute to chance all things that happen contrary to calculation (*παρὰ λόγον*). " Closely associated with the element of accident is that of blunder (I. 84, 140) ; both factors being illustrated by the event in the war which he describes as the one that came about most casually (IV.3 foll).¹ Through it all he insists that success is gained chiefly by human judgment and forethought (*γνώμη, προνοία*)—even his superstitious Nikias would fain insure

¹ Here again Thucydides' thought may be expressed in Baconian phraseology : " It cannot be denied but outward accidents conduce much to Fortune. . . . But chiefly, the mould of a man's Fortune is in his own hands. . . . And the most frequent of external causes is that the folly of one man is the Fortune of another. For no man prospers so suddenly as by others' errors."—*Essay Of Fortune*.

himself against the vagaries of chance by reasoned preparation (VI. 23); and only the unfortunate Melians are represented as putting their trust (with disastrous consequences) in the fortune which, according to the popular belief, came from the gods and favoured the just (V. 104).

In short, whether there be a Super-nature or not, Thucydides makes it clear that our business is with nature.

His work marks a new departure in historical writing—a revolution from the mythic or semi-mythic to the rationalist standpoint. But it is not, as it has been described, most wonderful when viewed relatively to the age in which it was written. It would, indeed, be more than wonderful—would be simply unaccountable—if we had nothing to compare it with except the other “histories” of that age; but the proper way to view it is in connection with a totally different class of writings. Thus viewed, the History of the Peloponnesian War ceases to be a wonder and becomes a normal, though in the highest degree notable, product of the spirit of its age. The change which it marks had been prepared by a corresponding change in the whole intellectual condition of Greece.

During the preceding century increased knowledge had produced, first among the Greek colonies in Asia Minor, several schools of natural science, differing amongst themselves, yet all based on a

strictly rational conception of the universe. With Anaxagoras, the most illustrious of the Ionic thinkers, science passed from Asia Minor to Athens, where the teacher taught during Thucydides' youth, enjoying the friendship of leading Athenians. The statement that Thucydides actually attended the lectures of Anaxagoras, though unsupported by evidence, seems credible enough; that he was uninfluenced by his teaching is utterly incredible. Anaxagoras, while making a supreme Intelligence the first cause, traced all natural phenomena to the operation of purely natural causes: in his system there was no room whatever for divine intervention. There were many other intellectual influences which Thucydides can hardly have escaped—which, it is to be presumed, helped to stimulate, to evoke and strengthen, his genius. There was his great contemporary, the physician Hippocrates, who emancipated medicine from religion and transformed an empirical craft into a scientific school.¹ There

¹ Among the guesses about the life of Thucydides, one of the most plausible is that the historian during his exile came into personal contact with Hippocrates, either in Thasos or in Thrace. Be this as it may, their writings exhibit a likeness in thought, and even in expression, which shows how the rational manner of seeing things pervaded the age, breaking up the mould of traditional conceptions. For illustrations of the resemblance, first pointed out by the French editor of Hippocrates Littré, see Forbes' *Thucydides*, Intr. pp. lxiii.-lxiv. This scholar also cites some fragments of the philosopher Democritus containing reflections in the same vein as those of Thucydides.—*Ibid.*, pp. lxxv.-lxxviii. These parallels, though not sufficient to prove any direct connection, are suggestive of Thucydides' relation to the ideas of his time.

was Protagoras, the first of the Sophists—a teacher who, though asserting the claims of ethical culture in opposition to natural science, yet concurred with the scientists in bringing to the study of social the same rationalistic spirit as they brought to the study of physical problems. Thus attacked from every side, the chaos where caprice ruled had been gradually yielding to the order that comes from Reason.

That the multitude violently resented a movement so subversive of established beliefs we know : both Anaxagoras and Protagoras had to seek safety in flight. Even superior minds did not all assimilate the new way of thinking with equal thoroughness. For instance, the great dramatist Euripides was what we now call an advanced thinker ; his contemporaries looked upon him as a free-thinker. Yet his plays embody no consistent rationalism, but rather rationalistic tendencies co-existing (incongruously enough) with some of the most irrational elements of primitive religion.

Every period of enlightenment abounds in cases of this kind. In the seventeenth century, an era of lively scientific activity, we find eminent physicians, like Sir Thomas Browne, believing in witchcraft ; professors of anatomy, like Sir John Finch, regarding the loss of a tooth as presaging the death of a friend ; nay, the genius which established the law of gravitation exercising itself upon the Book of Daniel. Such imperfect assimilation has not even

yet ceased. Only minds of a rare temper—minds in which the receptive and assimilative powers are equally developed—attain to complete harmony and apply a dominant principle consistently.

The peculiar merit of Thucydides is that he was the first to apply rationalism to history ; for the change in the intellectual standpoint had not yet touched historical literature. We have seen how Herodotus—a native of Asia Minor, the home of science, and moreover a man who had travelled in many parts of the world, conversed with many sorts of men, and formed a practical philosophy from wide experience of human life ; whose mind, too, was open upon many points and whose book breathes an air of liberal curiosity shot with flashes of penetrative insight—conceived the office of a historian. It does not, of course, follow that Herodotus took his divinities seriously ; it may be that his own faith in them was no more real than the faith of the dramatist in the *deus ex machina*—a convenient device consecrated by custom : that, in brief, he only gave the public what the public wanted. But, be this as it may, there were his celebrated *Logoi* to show how the old views still clung to history ; which was further vitiated by careless inaccuracy, love of exaggeration, addiction to entertaining anecdote, and indiscriminate acceptance of ancient lore—all of which properly belongs to a rudimentary age.

To Thucydides, whose mind did not work in compartments, this appeared a regrettable, even an irritating anomaly. While a critical spirit was as yet unknown, while all nature was regarded as controlled by supernatural powers and human vicissitudes were attributed to miraculous agency, as long as this conception of the universe prevailed, it was inevitable that the position of the poet and of the chronicler should be the same; that each should recognise the same ideal and adopt the same standard. But now that sober thought had dawned over every other sphere, how could the record of national affairs alone remain a night of distempered dreams? The old views Thucydides condemns, as we have seen, mostly by implication: perhaps he felt that by so doing he had done enough to cast the light of sense upon popular superstition. But on the other puerilities he speaks out. Here his tone is that of a militant pioneer—as unmistakable as Hippocrates' manifesto against medical charlatanism.

Men, he says in effect, are too apt to accept accounts of past events without examination; even as to facts easily ascertainable they will sooner turn to any statement ready at hand than give themselves the trouble to ascertain them. The serious student must take nothing on trust. He must believe neither the exaggerated tales of bards nor the narratives of logographers, who aim at

charming the ear rather than at telling the truth. Reality bare and unadorned, he is well aware, may not be very entertaining. But he does not write to entertain. His aim is to produce a book of permanent value, for those who value such things, rather than to compete for the rhetorical triumph of an hour (I. 20-22).

In this introduction, with its subtle hit at Herodotus, we have Thucydides' conception of history. He draws a sharp and contemptuous contrast between the poets and the chroniclers—who made it their business to throw into attractive shape the current traditions, beliefs, and opinions, untrammelled by adherence to any but artistic truth and concerned only to amuse—on the one hand, and, on the other, the student who cares for historical facts and who knows that historical facts can only be ascertained, if at all, by sceptical inquiry—by that close and cold scrutiny which nips like a frost the fables dictated by ignorance or interest and fostered by credulity. It is the attitude of the modern historian.

Not that this attitude has superseded the other—assuredly not. Only few persons in any age are fond of truth pure and simple ; the average man, now as then, prefers a genial laxity to stern veracity ; he thinks lightly of accuracy, of research, of balanced judgments, and readily confers the title of historian upon vivacious rhetoricians who neither give

nor take pains. Therefore, it is easier to speak of “ancients” and “moderns” than to fix the dividing line. In fact, chronologically speaking, no such line can be fixed : it is not so much its time which makes a mind “ancient” or “modern” as its type. Nevertheless, provided we know what we mean, we may—nay, must—use the distinction, since none better is available. For the work of Thucydides does illustrate the influence of the same spirit of rationalism or scepticism which, stirred by physical science, spread to other fields of study and created historical literature in modern Europe.

CHAPTER III

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

It is, of course, inevitable that the History of Thucydides should differ in some respects from the works of modern historians. The difference becomes manifest in those parts where he deals with what we may call the dark ages of Greece. Modern historians since the eighteenth century, in dealing with such periods, have been inclined to pin themselves severely to evidence, rejecting all traditions, irrespective of intrinsic probability. Thucydides will not reject any tradition, except in so far as it conflicts with probability. He is sensible that most matters relating to early ages, "through the lapse of time, have won their way to the region of fable." Yet, on the whole, he considers that anyone who makes up his mind to be satisfied "with conclusions drawn from the clearest indications which can be obtained for a state of things so long past, would not be mistaken" (I. 21). In his view, there is no absolute break between the prehistoric and the historic. Although the occurrences of antiquity have come to us disfigured, and the evidences are fragmentary, he holds that out of these

materials, carefully selected, we may build up a real, however imperfect, picture of the past.

To many nowadays it seems that Thucydides stretches his historical faith too far. And indeed mere intrinsic probability is by no means a sufficient guarantee of reality. Nothing, for instance, could be more probable in itself than the traditional derivation of the names of various Greek tribes from a common ancestor. Yet in treating Helen and his sons as real men the ancient historian took much for granted. Modern researches among the customs and languages of many nations have resulted in the discovery that a national name often is derived from a chief who never existed. Here Thucydides' method is deficient. The deficiency, needless to say, is not discreditable to him. Knowledge advances by steps, and not by leaps. Standing where he did, Thucydides could not have anticipated such a development in scientific scepticism, and he accepted without suspicion what only comparative ethnography and philology have taught us to suspect.

On the other hand, the very enlargement of the modern outlook, coupled with the general reaction against blind faith, far from always leading students to solid truth, has not infrequently plunged them deeper into the mists of fancy. Every legend has been denounced as pure fiction on the assumption that the human mind in rude ages can produce

nothing else ; and from this assumption, largely and indiscriminately adopted during the nineteenth century, sprang a multitude of mythological theories.

Among the tales to which all historic basis has thus been denied is the tale of Troy. We need only mention as a curiosity the theory that the Trojan siege is a solar myth—the abduction of Helen by Paris symbolising the extinction of the sunlight in the west ; or the one which allegorised away the events in the Trojan plain as mere types of human conduct or destiny, and assured us that the chiefs who figure therein existed as much as the gods who mix themselves up in their struggles. It is the bane of erudition that natural views are continually crowded out, and artificial ones substituted as fast as they are exploded—particularly in epochs when the human intellect, long repressed, breaks through secular barriers with such vehemence as to sweep away all rules of commonsense. But anyone who has studied at first hand folk ballads and other national traditions capable of control by authentic records has learnt that they represent more often a distorted memory than a sheer invention. Broadly speaking (it is not necessary to go the whole way with those who, under the influence of a counter-reaction, would over-estimate the credibility of antiquity) the heroic legends which profess to embody the early exploits of a nation are often only exaggerations of real occurrences—a tradition,

though suspect in detail, may have a large element of general truth at the bottom of it. And, to return to the legend of Troy, it has been well said, there is no argument urged against the existence of Agamemnon which would not, if consistently followed out in principle, as completely disprove the existence of Charlemagne, while topography and archaeology supply strong arguments for the existence of a city corresponding to Homer's Troy. In fact, all presumptive evidence is in favour of the legend, and there is none against it.

Thucydides does not allow his scepticism to run wild. He sees no reason to question the reality of the Trojan War, but contents himself with ignoring the superhuman and subjecting the human part of the story to critical examination. The process by which he does this is typical of the scientific method applied to the past : by reference to causes and laws which are now in operation and of which we have experience. To begin with, he will not swallow the romantic origin of the expedition, transmitted by the bards, in its entirety. The abduction of Helen may well have been the point of honour which started the war ; but his experience of men and statesmen inclines him to think that Agamemnon obtained the other chiefs' co-operation, not because they had bound themselves by oath to avenge the insult, but because his power constrained them. He infers Agamemnon's maritime strength

from Homer's description of him as king of many islands. "Living on the mainland," argues the historian, "he could not have ruled over any except the adjacent islands (which would not be 'many'), unless he had possessed a considerable navy" (I. 9).

It is, of course, possible to suggest another origin—for instance, a combined effort on the part of the Greeks to open the Straits to the Black Sea trade, closed by the Trojans.¹ But though such a motive may be more convincing as an ultimate cause of the war, the motive assigned by Homer is, as an ostensible cause, not less probable: we have known much lesser insults than the abduction of a queen furnish pretexts for fighting; and perhaps Thucydides, who knew his countrymen, knew how much easier it was for them to combine from fear than from the sense of a common interest.

As to the size of the armament, Thucydides, while making full allowance for poetic exaggeration, will not hasten to minimise it simply because Agamemnon's city, Mycenae, appeared small. That, he says, would be a deceptive criterion. Suppose

¹ See *Troy: A Study in Homeric Geography*. By Walter Leaf, Litt. D., (1912). I cannot subscribe to the distinguished author's doctrine that "the ultimate cause of war is, almost without exception, economic." There are, I believe, more causes of war than economists have dreamed of. But this stricture nowise affects his main thesis, which is based on the sound view that the tale of Troy embodies a tradition of actual facts. Other suggestions, also assuming the historical character of the war, were once made by Payne Knight and were treated by Grote as unworthy of consideration, on the ground that the subject could not "be shown to belong to the domain of history."—Grote's *History of Greece* (ed. 1888), Vol. I. p. 282.

the city of Sparta were to be laid desolate and nothing left of it but the temples : distant ages would hesitate to believe that the power of the Spartans was at all equal to their fame ; yet they own two-fifths of the Peloponnesus and are acknowledged leaders of the whole, as well as of numerous allies all over Greece. On the other hand, he adds, projecting himself by another effort of historic imagination into a future when Athens might meet the same fate, her magnificent ruins would lead posterity to overrate her actual power. We ought not, then, to be unduly sceptical, and we may fairly suppose the Trojan expedition to have been greater than any which preceded it, though, even accepting the Homeric estimate without discount, it fell short of those of his own day, owing to want of money : the expeditionary force was limited by the difficulty of obtaining supplies to such a number as could live on the country in which it fought (I. 10-11).

Could any argument be more modern, any method more scientific ? The same qualities are illustrated by the historian's use of evidence derived from finds in graves and survivals of primitive culture (I. 5-6, 8). Through this combination of observation and reasoning, deductive and inductive, quickened by imaginative insight, Thucydides succeeded in conceiving the gradual advance of Greece to civilisation, in tracing the progress from a migratory to a settled existence, and in realising the sea-power of

the extinct Minoan empire (I. 2, 4, 8) which, with Crete as its centre, dominated and policed the Eastern Mediterranean—a realisation amply borne out by recent excavations. His greatness as an investigator lies in his firm grasp of basic principles and in his application of them to the study of antiquity. The uniformity of human nature is a cardinal point in Thucydides' mind ; another point is that events have always followed the same orderly sequence. So, when he casts his eyes backward over the past, he takes the living present for his guide ; and his fancy never leads him away from the world of facts. It is these traits which give the opening chapters of his book lasting value. With the help of the spade, archaeological science has no doubt advanced beyond the knowledge possessed by Thucydides. That matters very little. We get in his Introduction not a manual of early Greek history, but a spirit of inquiry ; and that spirit will survive all discoveries.¹

Thus, even in dealing with the very ages the story of which he could hardly do more than guess at, Thucydides felt that there is such a correspondence in all ages that, when a few traces and remains of intelligible import have been brought to light, safe conclusions may be drawn from them concerning other things from which it is not in our

¹ For the conclusions which the soundest scholarship, fortified by such discoveries, has now reached on this obscure period, see *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. II. (1924).

power to clear away the mists ; much as in mathematics, if but a few things are given, we may dispense with an actual measurement. There may frequently be hazard in such a process ; but that which will not admit of being abused is good for nothing. And the historian makes no pretence to greater definiteness than can be expected for so dim an age.

In his treatment of contemporary events also the standard of Thucydides is as strictly scientific as the nature of the subject permits. Even those who claim that history is a science, no more and no less, must recognise that the study of human affairs can never attain the same exactitude as the study of physical phenomena. Were it feasible for the student himself to be always an eye-witness of the facts, still we could not be always sure that either his observation or his presentation of them was quite free from error and bias—bias due to temperament or to upbringing, or to a preconceived idea, even where no personal interest is involved. The dangers are naturally multiplied when the student receives his information at second hand.

Although Thucydides had never heard the words “subjective” and “objective,” he understood the distinction tolerably well. “Of the things done in the War,” he tells us, “I have not thought fit to write from any haphazard information, or according to any notion of my own : but both of

what I myself witnessed and of what I learned from others after examining every thing as accurately as possible.”¹ He adds that he found the task very difficult. “Those who were present at the various actions did not give the same account of the same occurrence, but each according to his sympathies with either side or according to his memory” (I. 22). Moreover, in the matter of battles, the investigator had to reckon with the fact that “the combatants see only what is going on immediately around them, and that imperfectly”—of the battle as a whole nothing (VII. 44). A difficult task, indeed, that of writing contemporary history at all times, and more so in an age when published official documents were few, and had to be consulted *in situ*, and the writer, in the absence of a Press, had to find his own intelligencers.

But Thucydides’ opportunities were not unequal to it: his station brought him into contact with many leading men; his wealth would open to him many sources of information. Further, his twenty years’ exile, he tells us, enabled him to associate with both sides and to study the progress of events quietly—to see more of the game than those im-

¹ It will be seen that my version of the latter part of the sentence differs from the common interpretation. After fully considering the Greek and the writer’s whole attitude, I have come to the conclusion that Thucydides means that he checked his own as well as other people’s impressions. This appears to be also the view of Thucydides’ latest translator, Mr. C. Foster Smith (Loeb Classical Library, 1919).

mersed in it (V. 26). During that period he visited several places, though it would be rash to infer from the vividness or minuteness of his descriptions that he was an eye-witness of any particular occurrence. It is evident, for instance, that for his account of the departure of the Athenian fleet on the Sicilian expedition (VI. 30-32), he had to draw on hearsay and his own imagination, since, being in exile, he could not have witnessed the scene he describes. In most cases, no doubt, he depended on second-hand information. How many loose and exaggerated statements he must have noted, only to reject—to how many long and involved recitals he must have had to listen, only to find that his informants were not worth listening to! But, as a man acquainted with human nature, Thucydides must have been prepared for such disappointments; and he seems to have laboured with all the patience and care of an earnest seeker after exact knowledge: collecting material from every quarter, collating it, sifting it, making allowances for the witnesses' limitations—bringing, in a word, to his task the same minute observation and discriminating analysis which are the basis of science; withal not forgetting, or letting us forget, **that** absolute exactitude is seldom attainable.¹

¹ The following expressions are characteristic: *ὅσον δυνατόν ἀκριβέστα*, "as accurately as possible" (I. 22); *ὅπως ἀκριβές τι εἶσομαι*, "more or less exact" (V. 26: the modifying force of the *τι* has escaped translators); *τοιούτη καὶ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τούτων* (V. 74, Cp. VII. 86), "such or very nearly so."

Traces of this laboratory work are visible in the History. Once, unable to ascertain how it happened, the writer gives two different versions, derived from opposite sides (II. 5). On another occasion he tells us that he refrains from recording casualties, because the multitude said to have fallen "seems unbelievable, in comparison with the size of the city" (III. 113). On a third, he confesses that his efforts to find out the exact number of the combatants were baffled by the secretiveness of one side and the boastfulness of the other (V. 68), and on a fourth, that he had failed to gain from the actors any precise details of the action (VII. 44). To these positive indications may be added some negative ones—missing links in the narrative which seem hard to account for, save on the supposition that the writer had been unable to obtain authoritative data at certain points;¹ and the systematic elimination of everything trivial, redundant, or irrelevant.

¹ For instance, after an allusion to Athenian hostilities with Perdiccas (VI. 7) Thucydides describes him as an ally of Athens (VII. 9), without explaining the circumstances which led to this change of front. It has been suggested that perhaps, in his pre-occupation with the Sicilian expedition, the matter slipped his memory. The suggestion assumes in Thucydides an omniscience given to few, if any, historians—especially of their own times. In like manner, it has been complained that he leaves us in doubt as to what the two Argives told King Agis in their private interview which induced him to retreat (V. 59-60). Had such questions been put to Thucydides, his answer, I imagine, would probably have been—to borrow Bishop Burnet's words—"I tell the truth on all occasions, as fully and freely as upon my best inquiry I have been able to find it out. Where things appear doubtful I deliver them with the same uncertainty to the world."—*History of my own Times*. Pref.

If Thucydides sometimes tells us less than we want to know about a transaction, he never tells us more : we have nothing but the facts, which are, in his judgment, pertinent and authentic.

For the most part, we are not to-day in a position to check the statements of Thucydides : his reputation for trustworthiness rests chiefly upon the impression produced by his manner of writing. He does not try to heighten a situation or to wring out of an incident more than it really contains. Such self-denial is so rare that the writer who can practise it will always reap his reward in the instinctive confidence with which he will inspire his readers. It is obvious to any reader of the History, not only that its author is a painstaking observer and a keen and subtle thinker, but also that his one interest is to render a true account of events—that he makes their just appreciation the prime object of his investigation. His very omissions constitute a guarantee of good faith ; and what they may detract from the completeness they add to the trustworthiness of the record. We do not mean that he is not liable to error or even to bias ; but his method of exposition is such that it enables us to form our independent opinion, which may, in certain cases, differ from his own.

Naturally, the temptation of the critic with a writer who sets down the net results of his investigations without naming his authorities, is to search

his book for inaccuracies and, having tabulated them, use their presence to assail his credibility. It is a temptation to which many critics have succumbed. But the few instances which they have discovered, if we could rely on the counter-evidence adduced, would only prove that on some minor points Thucydides' information was defective ; which, however, does not appear to be the case : the weight of the counter-evidence is a matter of opinion.¹ Where his accuracy can be put to the decisive test of contemporary inscriptions, it is not found wanting.

Thus when in 1877 a marble slab was unearthed on the Acropolis, containing a fragment of the Treaty between Athens and the Argive Confederacy, which Thucydides gives in full (V. 47), an eminent scholar, Kirchhoff, announced that he had discovered in the historian's copy no fewer than thirty-one divergences from the original. Thirty-one errors in a small fraction of the whole document ! We look into the matter—and we find that of these only seven occur in the inscription itself, the rest being but variations from Kirchhoff's own conjectural restoration of the broken lines ; and that all of them are mere inversions in the order of names, omissions of formal repetitions, orthographical or grammatical

¹ On what slender grounds these impeachments rest may be judged by reference to Forbes' *Thucydides*, Intr. pp. lxxxii. cxii. ; and Notes, pp. 75, 134-135.

differences, not in a single case affecting the sense.

Now, we have no reason to believe that Thucydides copy of the Treaty was obtained from the tablet in question : it is just as possible that it was obtained from another version recorded in the Peloponnesus. But even accepting the assumption, what then ? The " errors " may be due to the long hierarchy of scribes through whose hands our text has passed, or to the person who perhaps made the copy for the author, or even to the author himself. However scrupulous about facts, Thucydides need not be supposed to have been punctilious about forms. One can say that a historian did not care overmuch for verbal exactitude without seriously damaging his credibility. Moreover, it is anything but certain that Thucydides meant to quote such documents *verbatim* : very probably, had he lived to finish his work, he would have summed them up and given their gist in his own words. The question, however, can only be of moment to the textual student and the grammarian. What matters to the student of history is that here we have an authentic State paper which stands the severest trial in a way that leaves nothing to be desired by the higher courts.

Let us add our author's solicitude about chronological precision : to secure which he adopted the method of recording events by summers and winters,

¹ For a detailed discussion see Jowett's *Thucydides*, vol. ii. pp. 311-3 ; Forbes' *Thucydides*, Intr. p. xciv.

in preference to the loose traditional custom of dating them by the names of magistrates (V. 20). Upon the enormous importance of accurate chronology it is not necessary to enlarge : it seems obvious enough now, though even now its value too often becomes manifest only by the neglect of it.

So far Thucydides' practice, like his creed, testifies to a clear perception of that prosaic truth of fact, as distinguished from mere poetic truth, which we require in the man of science and the modern historian. We now approach a point where our author betrays an imperfect recognition of this distinction. " With regard to the speeches made by the various parties either when they were about to go to war or during the war, it was hard both for me, in respect of what I myself heard, and for those who reported to me from elsewhere, to remember the exact words ; I have, therefore, written what I thought most appropriately to each occasion the various parties would say ; at the same time, adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said " (I. 22)—much like Dr. Johnson's system of reporting parliamentary debates, less the deliberate bias.

We are almost back again in the realm of poetry, where the rules of the art demand fidelity to an idea, but allow free play to fancy in its expression—where verisimilitude takes the place of verity. This is disconcerting. But when we know this, we

know the worst, though hyper-sceptical critics have done their best to aggravate matters. For instance, it has been alleged that Thucydides introduced speeches, not only where speeches had really been made, but wherever it suited his purpose. Quite a gratuitous allegation, in face of the historian's candid avowal of the extent of the latitude he allowed himself. Another charge is that he shifted speeches about according to his convenience : witness the famous *Epitaphios* : Pericles did indeed deliver a funeral oration, but not when Thucydides attributes it to him—on a different occasion, some ten years earlier ! So grave a charge of poetic license could only have been warranted by evidence strong enough to upset the historian's categorical assertion (II. 34). As it is, without an atom of evidence, we are asked to believe that he ventured to produce a circumstantial report of something that never took place, and which every Athenian could refute. A very bold thing for an author to do, and a still bolder thing for a critic to allege. The critics, to be sure, do not deny that Pericles may have spoken at both funerals. If so, why raise the question at all ? Not only is there no ground for doubting that Pericles was chosen to speak on the present occasion (despite the insignificance of the engagements and the small number of dead, the occurrence being the first of its kind would obviously be celebrated with special *éclat*), but his speech

was appropriate to the present occasion only. Pericles, who had had considerable difficulty in persuading his countrymen to go to war, seizes the opportunity to impress upon them that they have a country pre-eminently worth fighting and dying for. This he does by a contrast of Athenian with Lacedaemonian institutions and characteristics, which, if "Prussian" be substituted for "Lacedaemonian" and "British" for "Athenian," bears an extraordinary resemblance to the utterances of our own public orators and writers in the first year of the Great War.¹ In all likelihood Thucydides heard the speech with his own ears (we know that he was at Athens shortly afterwards when the plague broke out). Similarly, there is antecedent probability that he may have heard all the other speeches made at Athens before his exile; though in every case what we have is the "general sense" rendered freely, condensed, strengthened, elevated, and altogether transfigured.²

Taken in the bulk, the speeches form the

¹ To avoid misapprehension, I would point out that this view is nowise inconsistent with the comparison of the Athenian to the German Empire already made in the Introductory chapter: the parallel is between the two *powers*; the contrast between the two *communities*.

² In default of any direct demonstration, the practice of Tacitus may afford an instructive analogy. A brazen table still extant preserves a speech of Claudius, reported by the historian: enabling us to judge *quantum Tacitus ingenio suo indulserit, ut eam historia dignam faceret*. See Gabriel Brotier's note on the *Annals*, xi. 24, and the original inscription. *C. Cornelii Taciti Opera*, vol. iii. pp. 390 foll.

philosophy of the History, as distinct from the facts ; and, whatever their "documentary" value, they are, beyond question, an invaluable storehouse of political thought. Hardly a problem of statesmanship is left untouched. Here is shown an island state whose constant policy had been to keep out of entangling alliances suddenly waking to the perils of isolation (I. 32) ; there the aim of another state's diplomacy as being, under specious pretences, to subdue by dividing (VI. 77, 79). The advantages of sea-power (I. 142, 143 ; II. 62), the weaknesses inherent in the nature of a coalition (I. 141), the respective merits of severity and magnanimity towards rebellious subjects (III. 39-40 ; 44-48), and many other questions of perennial interest are discussed with a perspicacity which has never been excelled. Above all, these debates explain acutely and convincingly the policies of the parties concerned—exhibiting various situations from opposite points of view—revealing, as it were, the springs which set the machinery in motion. Naturally, the arguments and sentiments are such as would come from speakers addressing a particular audience with a particular object. For this reason, wherever necessary, the author supplements them with direct explanations. On no part of his book has Thucydides lavished more labour, and no part of his labour has been more fruitful in suggestion to political thinkers of after ages.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Obviously, Thucydides felt that, in addition to an accurate knowledge of events, the historian must gain and impart a correct interpretation of them—a task far more difficult. It was this difficulty Dr. Johnson had in mind when he said: “We must consider how very little history there is; I mean real authentic history. That certain kings reigned, and certain battles were fought, we can depend upon as true; but all the colouring, all the philosophy of history is conjecture.”

This, I think, is an overstatement. That conjecture enters into the interpretation of historical as of physical facts, God forbid I should deny—without conjecture knowledge cannot move a step. But that all the philosophy of history is mere conjecture I gravely doubt.

Besides, the need to philosophise about events is innate in us—historical philosophy is older than history and older than philosophers. A child listening to a fairy-tale is not satisfied with a bare series of remarkable occurrences: it wants to know

the reason why ; and when rational explanation fails, the raconteur has recourse to an irrational one. A grown-up student is equally unable to content himself with a dry almanac. Whether he should do so, is not the question—moralise and dogmatise about it as you like, we must hazard some interpretation of the events which arouse our interest ; and I think we are justified in hazarding that which explains the most numerous and most significant points in the most probable way.

The only question is : Who is sufficiently a master of signs to read human affairs aright ? to trace in every movement the part which belongs to individuals and the part which belongs to general causes, without ignoring or exaggerating either ? Studious recluses, living too much in the closet and too little in the world, reading life by the light of abstract reason rather than by that of experience, are prone to attribute all great events to great causes and general principles, taking no account of great men, or small men in great places. The clash of personalities is nothing to them. On the other hand, practical politicians, diplomatists and journalists, engrossed by the daily struggle, seem incapable of taking broad views; they lay stress on trifles, magnify accidents, ascribe every action to a personal motive—usually a sordid one—or to a personal passion—usually a mean one ; and would fain persuade us that this world of ours is a sort of madhouse peopled

by imbeciles, more or less honest, under the control, more or less evident, of clever rogues.

A judicious observer, who lives with his head in his study, but with his hand on the pulse of the world, will not neglect either line of inquiry, but will judge each case on its merits—taking nothing for granted, but weighing each possible explanation by his experience in general and his knowledge of the particular circumstances and men concerned. But he will labour in vain, unless his researches are quickened by that faculty of apprehending and realising the varieties of character and circumstances on which the correct understanding of actions and actors ultimately depends: that is, the power of conjecture which Dr. Johnson despised.

Call it imagination, intuition, acumen, insight, certain it is that, other qualifications being equal—such as love of truth, opportunities for investigation, industry, appreciation of evidence—the more of this indefinable and inestimable faculty a student possesses, the nearer he will get to real comprehension. Even in physical science success often depends less on careful observation or close reasoning than on what, the late Lord Rayleigh once said, “seems like a natural instinct for the truth—one of the rarest of gifts.” This gift enables the owner to see as in a flash the real bearing of facts, to distinguish between the essential and the accidental, to piece them together in their true inner sequence.

And his happiest moment is when—as sometimes does happen—he discovers direct evidence expressly confirming his conclusions.

How near did Thucydides attain to this ideal of the complete interpreter? We can judge by his work.

As amongst us to-day, so amongst the Greeks of the day of Thucydides, there were people who believed that, if this or that had been done, or undone, at a given moment, the war which produced so much misery might have been avoided; some pointing to Athens' action anent Epidamnus and Potidaea, most regarding the disabilities imposed on the Megarians by Pericles and his obstinate refusal to remove them as the main source of the mischief.¹ Thucydides saw things in a perspective different from that in which they appeared to the average contemporary.

In describing the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War he relates the disputes which led to it: showing the crisis in the colours under which it presented itself to the eyes of the man in the street. But, conscious that such disputes are rather the symptoms and pretexts than the causes of war, he intimates that, in his own view, the most real, though least

¹ This view, forcibly expounded by Aristophanes (*Acharnians*, 515 foll.), has found its way into the writings of later authors like Plutarch: who, however, cautiously ends the discussion of Pericles' motives on a non-committal note: τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ἀδύλον. —*Pericles*, xxxii.

spoken of, cause was the growth of the Athenian power, which alarmed the Lacedaemonians and forced them to fight (I. 23). As this view was not supported by outside evidence, he is at first careful to give it as a personal opinion—"I consider"—leaving the reader to judge according to the facts and his own lights. But presently he states it as a thing proven: "The Lacedaemonians resolved to go to war, not so much because they were convinced by the arguments of their allies, as because they were afraid that the Athenians might grow more powerful; for they saw most of Greece already subject to them" (I. 88). He even amplifies it: "The Lacedaemonians had long suffered the Athenian Empire to grow with hardly any attempt at interference. They were never eager for hostilities, and, besides, they were prevented by troubles at home. But at last action became imperative: the peril could no longer be ignored: the Athenian power was growing too great and too aggressive. Therefore they decided to put forth all their strength and crush it" (I. 118). So easy is it, even for the most careful thinkers, to mistake their own inferences for evidence. True, Thucydides was not the man to jump to conclusions. Given perplexity as to the cause of any phenomenon, he would look at the circumstances most closely and refuse to entertain any explanation which did not cover all the circumstances.

At the risk of digression, we must illustrate this trait of his mind by a concrete instance. When the Plague broke out, both physicians and laymen were greatly exercised about its origin. Apart from the supposition, which seems to be inevitable in such cases, that the enemy had poisoned the wells, the masses would naturally attribute the visitation to divine wrath; the more enlightened to the unhealthy conditions created by overcrowding.¹ Thucydides notes that the overcrowding aggravated the evil and that, next to Athens, the most populous places suffered most severely. But, while these conditions might account for the intensity of the disease, they were not sufficient to account for its origin: first, the pestilence was reported to have arisen in the East, and secondly, although Athens continued overcrowded, she was attacked by the epidemic only twice. That being so, the historian leaves both physicians and laymen to expound to their hearts' content "the causes which each considers sufficient"; he will restrict himself to an accurate record, from personal observation and experience, of the circumstances, judging that the only profitable course in the actual state of knowledge. He writes as one who believes that a few grains of fact secured to the world once for all are worth more than many clever hypotheses.

¹ This point, more fully brought out by Plutarch (*Pericles*, xxxiv), is indicated by Thucydides, II. 52. For the other statements in the paragraph see II. 48, 52, 54; III. 87.

Such a writer would not advance an opinion incautiously ; and, in fact, to return to our subject, Thucydides, unlike modern historians, begins by setting forth both cases fairly and fully, and only after all parties have been heard (I. 66-87), and light has been brought to the present quarrel by a retrospective survey of antecedent events (I. 89-117), does he venture to pronounce a definitive judgment. Still, opinion is one thing ; proof another.

This, however, is but a venial fault compared with another laid to the charge of Thucydides : that he has entirely misunderstood the origin of the War, and that those who made it were the commercial, industrial, and sea-going people of the Piræus, "led by low-born tradesmen." This class, so runs the argument, is not mentioned by Thucydides or any other contemporary writer as exercising a decisive influence on the policy of Athens, because all these writers were true Athenian gentlemen, and the last thing a true Athenian gentleman would admit even to himself would be that the despised shopkeepers possessed such influence. We ought not to let our vision be distorted by the prejudice of our authorities. This new force in Athenian politics, we are to infer, made the War, because to them profit was the dominant motive, and the Empire meant command of the main trade routes—more specifically the trade route across the Megarian territory to the Corinthian Gulf and thence, after

cutting out Corinth, to the West—Sicily and Carthage. This “obscure, inarticulate army of tradesmen and handworkers, leaders of commerce and industry, merchants and sea-captains,” it would seem, had elaborated in the wine-shops a far-reaching plan of expansion ; and, as a first step, had compelled Pericles, much against his will, to adopt the policy of coercion towards Megara which was the principal complaint brought forward by the Peloponnesians. Thucydides does not lay stress upon this aspect of the question, because, we are told, he was not aware of its importance : he always regarded the Sicilian expedition and the design on Carthage as later developments : he never saw their connection with the Megarian boycott : he only went by Pericles’ official utterances, and could not know that Pericles had adopted the anti-Megarian policy under pressure from the mercantile majority on which his power depended. Above all, being an “ancient ” and not a “modern,” he could have no idea of the economic factor in human affairs : the only factors which he could think of were psychological—the characters and motives of states and statesmen : whereas modern historians look to social and economic conditions, the ancients assumed that every human motive was a first cause : human action was not to them part of a universal causal *nexus*. Thucydides was like the rest of them : he had no science or scientific conceptions : witness

his account of the transactions which led to the war : he does not speak, as has always been supposed, of *causes*, but merely of *grievances* : there is neither in his vocabulary an expression nor in his mind a notion even approximately equivalent to our "cause and effect."¹

Controversy is an ungentle art ; but it can be useful when the issue goes to the very root of things. By dealing with this indictment we shall be enabled to set in a stronger and clearer light Thucydides' place among philosophic historians. First, about the popular movement alleged to have dictated the Megarian policy. Nothing, of course, would be more unwarrantable than to deny that for large sections of the Athenian people money was an end and conquest was essential to that end ; and we actually find, at other times, those sections urging on with the greatest vehemence the conquest of Sicily. The theory, therefore, is not inconsistent with certain known tendencies of the Athenian Demos. But this is a historical question : Did things so happen at the present time or did they not ? If the alleged movement was directed by "leaders of commerce and industry," it is impossible that it should have been ignored by Thucydides : such men were no more despised in Athens than they are in England : they were as important and as highly

¹ The above is an accurate summary of a proposition set forth in the first 76 pages of *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, by F. M. Cornford (1907).

respected as the territorial aristocrats. Nikias, the leader of the aristocratic party, derived his wealth and influence chiefly from the exploitation of silver mines¹; and Thucydides was himself engaged in the gold-mining industry. If it was "led by low-born tradesmen," however much aristocratic writers may have despised men of this type, there is no reason why they should not have noted their activities now as they did a few years later, had they known of them. In either case, we are asked to believe that an agitation which plunged Athens into war went on among the noisiest elements of the population, and not the faintest hint of its significance reached any contemporary observer. It would need very strong evidence, or very robust faith, to overcome the inherent improbability of such a supposition. Whereas, according to Thucydides, Pericles had to use his utmost endeavours to induce the Athenian people first to go to war and then to persevere in it (I. 140-145; II. 13, 59-65). Such is the historian's matter-of-fact account; and no theory is needed to harmonise it with the probabilities of the situation.

¹ Plut. *Nikias*, IV. How profoundly the transformation, begun by Solon and finished by Themistocles, of a community mainly agricultural into a community mainly commercial—the cardinal change which had conditioned almost all the rest—had affected social values may be seen from the fact that even "some of the wealthier of the unenfranchised aliens," as Mr. Cornford admits, "mixed on equal terms with the Athenian aristocracy." p. 20.

As to Western expansion, it is not impossible that a policy of this sort may have been once entertained by Pericles, who, during the earlier period of his career, may have aimed, by the occupation of Megara and the absorption into the Athenian confederacy of Boeotia, Phokis, Locris, and Achaia, at dominating the Greek end of the route to Italy and Sicily.¹ However, if that was his policy, it had been frustrated by the reverses which, ending in the Thirty Years' Peace (445 B.C.), lost Athens all those acquisitions and with them her hold on the Corinthian Gulf. True, on the eve of the Peloponnesian War, the Corcyraeans, in asking Athens to receive them as allies, pointed out how conveniently their island was situated either to prevent a fleet from Italy and Sicily coming to the aid of the Peloponnesians or to help a fleet going from Athens thither—an argument which the Athenians took into consideration when they decided to conclude an alliance with Corcyra (I. 36, 44). About the same

¹ The danger of a Peloponnesian invasion of Attica through Megaris and Athens' rivalry with Corinth suffice to explain these activities, and as Troezen was included there is no need to connect them with a Western programme. According to Plutarch, who speaks without quoting any authority, in that era of their greatest power and prosperity many Athenians coveted Sicily, while to some even the conquest of Tyrrhenia and Carthage seemed a not unrealisable dream, but Pericles firmly restrained their ardour. Whatever the historical value of his statement, Plutarch represents these aspirations as the wild impulses of men *ὑπὸ βώμης καὶ τύχης τοσαύτης ἐπαιρουμένων*.—*Pericles*, xx, xxi. Of course, if we like, we can imagine that Plutarch mistook serious aims for wild impulses. But there is endless room for this not very profitable exercise of the imagination.

time they appear to have entered into a treaty with Leontini and Rhegium. But these measures are sufficiently accounted for by the fact that many Greek states in Italy and Sicily were friends, and very soon figure as allies, of Athens' enemies.¹ Further, Thucydides tells us that one of the disadvantages which handicapped the Peloponnesians in war was their dependence for food supplies on their own agricultural labour: this debarred them from prolonged campaigning on land and, of course, from manning ships (I. 141). Now, Sicily, a corn-producing country, could most materially assist them. It therefore behoved the Athenians to prevent such assistance; and, as a matter of fact, when they sent their fleet to Sicily in 427, they did so chiefly "from a wish that no corn might be brought thence to the Peloponnesus" (III. 86). At most, we may suppose that Western expansion was a potential scheme which in certain eventualities might become actual. But there is absolutely nothing to show that it was on the tapis in 431. The Athenian people,

¹ That the Athenian treaty with Corcyra was concluded in 433-2 and the one with Leontini and Rhegium shortly afterwards, while of the Lacedaemonian connection with the Sicilian and Italian states we do not hear until the beginning of the war in 431 (II. 7), proves nothing to the contrary: Thucydides is equally silent about the conclusion of the Athenian treaty with Leontini, which we know from an inscription, the historian mentioning it only in 427, as an "old alliance" (III. 86). Unless those states had already in 433-2 with the Lacedaemonian Confederacy a friendly understanding which left little doubt as to the side they would take in case of war, the Corcyraeans could not have referred to the contingency of naval reinforcements coming from them to the Peloponnesus.

at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, according to Thucydides, far from envisaging the possibility of getting more, were terribly afraid that they might lose what they had got—and Pericles himself based his strategy expressly on the prudent avoidance of all attempts at expansion during the war (I. 144 ; II. 65). It was only after his death, when things turned out contrary to their fears, that the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme, and, no longer content with preservation, the Athenians hankered after aggrandisement.

The historian puts the first experimental attempts on Sicilian independence in 427-425, when Athens began to interfere actively in the feuds of the island (III. 86)—which to some modern critics seems a mistaken ante-dating of a design not conceived until 416. Much as this theory would strengthen my argument, I must decline to avail myself of it. It may be presumed that Thucydides—a Strategos in 424—was in a better position to form conclusions on the subject than any scholar living over twenty-three hundred years after the event. Be this as it may, in representing the Sicilian enterprise as a later development of the Peloponnesian War, the historian is supported by our experience of similar phenomena in modern times. As a rule, a war is entered upon with a limited and definite object—such as Pericles had in view. But when success has enabled a nation to

obtain that object, it is then that its aims become enlarged, its ambitions inflated, its appetites inflamed—particularly if in the interval the management of affairs has passed out of the hands of statesmen into those of adventurers: just what happened at Athens, according to Thucydides, who holds up to us the facts in an order of thought that seems correct, because it agrees with all known counterparts: a sound enough criterion, if we are right in believing that in politics, as in the processes of nature, similar combinations will bring about similar results. Certainly such was Thucydides' own belief—that phenomena "though varying in force and form with every new combination of circumstances, are bound to recur as long as the nature of man continues the same" (III. 82).

The ancient writer, it will be observed, had a pretty clear perception of causality. But he was too wise to ignore humanity. Although circumstance sets the stage, it is man who acts. His intellect and his character shape his conduct. It is impossible to deal with matters historical except in terms of human mentality and psychology. The political historian has nothing to do with "a universal causal *nexus*," and everything with the human motives which are called into existence by circumstances and which prompt human action. Upon these premises he must necessarily base his conclusions. And that is the way in which Thucydides

handles the subject : indicating the remoter but insisting upon the nearer causes. For example, political circumstance was the primary cause of the Spartan regime (IV. 80) ; but the national character, formed by that regime (I. 84), was the proximate cause of Spartan inaction or dilatoriness on many occasions (II. 94 ; III. 29 ; VIII. 96). Of geographical circumstance as a cause of conduct we have examples in the vicinity of Syracuse, which dictated Camarina's attitude (VI. 88), and in the insular situation of other states, which compelled their alliance with the masters of the sea (VII. 57) : in both cases the geographical cause naturally translates itself into the immediate psychological motive of fear. Social and economic conditions—poverty, affluence, and the like—also have their several influences (III. 45, 82). And again, consistently with the scientific view that human beings act ultimately from the impulse of outward circumstances, Thucydides attributes the migrations in early times to the influence of the soil (I. 2). But he seeks the solution of the problems set by circumstance in man—distinguishing between ostensible and underlying reasons, or between pretended and genuine motives. It is he who introduced this distinction into political literature, and he employs, just as modern political writers do, these and analogous phrases to express the forces operative in the minds of statesmen who direct the policies

of states. Thus he tells us that all the alleged grounds for the Peloponnesian War merely covered "the most real cause" (τὴν ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν),¹ of which no one spoke: the growth of Athenian power—that alarmed the Lacedaemonians and convinced them that they must fight. Without prejudging the question whether this was or was not the true cause of the War—a matter which will be discussed hereafter—what is there to impugn the adequacy of such an explanation?² There seems something humorous in an attempt to explain away

¹ 1. 23. Thucydides' use of *πρόφασις*, which strictly means a *pretext*, in the sense of *αἰτία*, a *cause*, has given rise to needless comment. We have in Isaeus *προφάσεις ἀναγκαίας* (48, 26) and in Demosthenes *τὴν ἀληθῆ πρόφασιν* (*De Cor.* 201), where the question is about the real motives of certain acts. Still more instructive is the passage in which Xenophon speaks of the cause of someone's death *ὁ γὰρ θάνατος αὐτοῦ . . . οὐκ ἔχων φανεράν πρόφασιν* (*Hellen.* VI. iv. 33), and several passages in Hippocrates where both terms are employed indifferently to denote the cause of a disease: *τὴν αἰτίην . . . ἀπὸ τοιαύτης προφάσιος* (*De Aëre*, etc. 22); *δι' οἷας προφάσιος . . . δι' οἷας αἰτίας* (*Vet. Med.*, 2; 20). So common indeed was this use of *πρόφασις* that even Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who subjected the historian's language to a most minute and unfriendly scrutiny, finds no difficulty in this expression: once he quotes it verbatim (*De Thuc. Hist. Jud.* 10), and another time, quoting, it would appear, from memory, he unconsciously substitutes its more correct equivalent *αἰτία* (*Thuc. Propr.* 6).

² I might refer to many instances. But I will content myself with two. A French historian explains the cause of the rupture of the peace of Amiens (1803) in the same words: "Dans le parlement anglais la cause de la rupture s'avouait hautement: c'était la trop grande puissance de la France," and he goes on to quote Fox: "cet accroissement extraordinaire, qui vous surprend, qui vous effraye. . . ."—Gustave Ducoudray, *Histoire Contemporaine* (1892), p. 275. An English writer explains the alliances and counter-alliances which heralded in the Great War as due to each country's fear of its neighbour's growing power.—See the *Times Lit. Suppl.*, April 26th, 1923.

a plain statement, which comes from and goes to the sound understanding, in order to make room for a hypothesis.

Not without humour, too, is the notion that the economic factor was "an entity he"—Thucydides, a mining magnate—"never dreamed of." Others, while absolving the historian from ignorance of financial matters, have suggested that he is disinclined to dwell on them, because they were considered ill-bred in the cultured society "to whose opinion he was so sensitive." The suggestion seems rather remote. The man who mentions the architectural masterpieces on the Acropolis only as items which had reduced the ready cash available for the war, and the statue of Athene in the Parthenon only to calculate the amount of gold which, in an emergency, might be transferred from it to the Treasury, cannot be supposed to have been restrained by any such delicacy. In point of fact, his restraint is no more than what we might expect of any historian who is not an economaniac.

No writer has ever laid greater stress on the supreme importance of money in war (I. 11, 83, 121, 141-142; II. 13; III. 46; VI. 34; VII. 48).¹ Nor has

¹ Note especially "War is not so much a matter of arms as of money, which gives to arms their use" (I. 83)—the original of the French commonplace *l'argent fait la guerre*, and (through Tacitus' *belli nervos*—Hist. ii. 84) of our own "sinews of war." Further references to finance will be found in I. 96; III. 17, 19; IV. 75; V. 18; VII. 28; VIII. *passim*.

any writer ever traced more clearly the interdependence of wealth and power, and the fundamental conditions necessary for the production of the one and the promotion of the other. Primitive Greece, he says, was weak, because there was no accumulated wealth: agriculture only yielded the bare means of subsistence, and trade did not exist, because there was no safe intercourse either by land or by sea. Later, when navigation grew more common, wealth began to accumulate: towns were built on the sea-shore, and isthmuses were occupied and fortified with a view to trade and defence against neighbours (I. 2, 7). In like manner, for Thucydides the power of the Atreidae had its origin in the riches which their ancestor Pelops had brought with him from Asia (I. 9). So present, indeed, was the question of finance to his mind that he assumes it, as a matter of course, to have been among the principal concerns of government in all times: Minos thought of revenue as much as Pericles (I. 4). Evidently, when modern writers invented the new term "economic factor," they did not discover a new truth.

Coming from the general to the particular, Thucydides relates how the rivalry between Athens and Corinth arose out of each state's pursuit of wealth and power. Corinth was first in the field: situated on an isthmus which formed the overland route of communication between the Peloponnesus and

Northern Greece—one of the greatest highways of Greek traffic—she naturally became from early days a trading centre: hence her wealth and consequently her power, both of which she increased afterwards by acquiring a fleet, putting down piracy, and affording a mart by sea as well (I. 13). Athens was not yet a competitor: in fact, there was a time, before the Persian invasion, when, needing ships for a war against Ægina, she borrowed twenty from Corinth (I. 41). The trouble began when, after the victory over the Persians, Athens became an aspirant to naval and commercial supremacy. The bone of contention was Megaris—a borderland between the rival states with two ports, Nisaea on the eastern, and Pegae on the western side. Thucydides describes the struggle in all its vicissitudes. He tells how the coveted territory fell alternately under Athenian and Corinthian domination, until the Athenians, having failed to conquer, proceeded to coerce by shutting out the Megarians from their market and all harbours in their empire: a measure which was treated by Sparta as a *casus belli* (I. 67, 103, 114, 139).

Having said all this, Thucydides says no more, for the very sufficient reason that there is no more to be said. The economic aspect of the Megarian question, though probably paramount to Corinth, was certainly not so to Sparta. She had no commercial rivalry with Athens. Her interest in the

matter was of a political and strategic nature. Should Megara, a member of the Peloponnesian Confederacy, fall under Athenian control, the passage through which alone Sparta could keep in touch with her allies in Central Greece and, when the worst came to the worst, invade Attica would be closed. As to the other inland members of the Confederacy, their economic interest in the question was only indirect. For this reason the Corinthians, in appealing to them, referred to the economic peril only incidentally: if those states did not join to stop Athenian encroachment upon the coast states, they would in the long run find their own export and import trade suffer (I. 120). And in their appeal to Sparta herself—with whom the decision of peace and war rested—they did not refer to it at all.

Thucydides did not look upon the economic factor as a master-key for the interpretation of all human action. But where that factor did furnish a primary cause of war, he says so: as in the case of Thasos. The Athenians, he records, fell out with the islanders about the Thracian markets and mines which the latter exploited; and after beating them, they proceeded to plant a colony at a point on the river Strymon, not far from the coast, where, as its name (*Ennea Hodoi*) proclaims, several trade-routes met. The upshot of these efforts was Amphipolis (I. 100-101; IV. 102). In this case

also, it will be noted, Thucydides exercises a great economy of explanation. He tells us all we want to know, and nothing more. There is no tiresome harping on the obvious. In reading his book one feels that one is reading a book written by a man of the world for men of the world.

In the case of the Peloponnesian War, which was a much more complex movement, Thucydides keeps the economic factor in the background, and brings the political factor to the front: Sparta's alarm at the growth of Athenian power. Is the picture in the right perspective?

It has been objected by a critic who does not dispute the historian's ability to interpret but only the correctness of this interpretation, that the power of Athens had not grown at an alarming rate latterly: on the contrary, the disasters which led to the Peace of 445 B.C. had been a terrible setback to her, "so much so that after that date she had pursued a conspicuously unaggressive policy in strong contrast to her policy in the previous period."¹ Doubtless the years which followed the Peace could not compare with those which preceded it; still, it was in these years that, by the subjugation of Samos (439 B.C.), another fleet had been added to the Athenian navy, and another source of revenue to the Athenian exchequer. In the same

¹ *Thucydides and the History of His Age*. By G. B. Grundy, D. Litt. (1911), p. 323. Cp. pp. 408-411.

years we find Athens fortifying herself with a third Long Wall, constructing new docks, increasing her land and sea forces, and laying up a reserve fund of coin which, even after a large expenditure for various purposes, amounted to 6000 talents.¹ It is needless to speak of the colonies by which her influence was extended during the same period. In the light of these facts, and of the whole tendency of Athenian aspirations, the lull must have appeared to thoughtful Spartans as merely temporary—no more than the collecting of strength for a fresh spring. Certainly nothing known of Pericles would justify the belief that he seriously intended that the truce of 445 should interrupt the development of his imperialist programme; and so long as that programme held the field, there could be on the Lacedaemonian side no feeling of security.² In any case, the lull had come to an end. However

¹ In addition to Thucydides who gives the total of Athens' strength, military, naval, and financial, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (II. 13), we have a lucid sketch of her steadily growing power since the Thirty Years' Peace by his contemporary Andokides (*De Pace*, 7). I think there is as little reason for questioning the substantial accuracy as the genuineness of this speech. Any serious misrepresentation of facts which must have been well known to the orator's public would have been fatal to his argument. Besides, his statement that 1,000 talents and 100 triremes were set apart is confirmed by Thucydides (II. 24); the only discrepancy being that the historian places these provisions in the first year of the War, while the orator refers them, loosely, to the Peace period.

² Plutarch (*Pericles*, xxiii.) reports, after Theophrastus and others, that Pericles spent ten talents a year in *douceurs* to the rulers of Sparta, "buying not peace, but time wherein to prepare for war at leisure." If not true, it is well invented.

unaggressive Athens may have been until these complications arose, her attitude in them was indicative of anything but a chastened spirit—it simply illustrated the character which the Corinthians gave the Athenians: “men born unable to enjoy rest themselves or to let others do so” (I. 70). Particularly Pericles’ determined effort to starve Megara into submission must have confirmed the suspicion that he was bent on regaining what he had been obliged to give up in 445: the control of the Isthmus and of the Corinthian Gulf, which meant ultimately a hold on the Peloponnesus and meanwhile its severance from its allies in Central Greece. It seems scarcely conceivable that Sparta could regard all these signs with indifference, even if the Megarian boycott were wiped out.

The historian’s view, highly probable in itself, gains from his manner of presenting it. He does not exaggerate the Spartans’ alarm, but throws into equally strong relief their cautious slowness. They were not to be carried away by other people’s oratory; or by a sudden impulse of their own. Nor would they allow themselves to drift, out of mere want of consideration and judgment, towards a cataract. That was not the Spartan way. After listening to many eloquent speeches, they took counsel among themselves, and they thought things out until their minds were fully made up that there was real cause for alarm—and action. Far from

the Spartans' marked reluctance to begin a war being inconsistent with their decision, the two states of mind are simply the obverse and reverse of the same medal. Thucydides shows us a government disinclined to fight, yet driven to do so by irresistible political necessity. Both its hesitation and its decision (the one voiced by King Archidamus, the other by Ephor Sthenelaïdas—I. 85, 86) can easily be accounted for. A state with a small ruling population and an enormous mass of disaffected serfs ever ripe for revolt had to think twice before plunging into a war which, in view of the antagonist's strength, was bound to last long—a war whose area none could limit and whose incidental developments and final consequences none could foresee. Sparta reckoned the risks. On the other hand, she could not let the balance of power upon which her own safety depended go by the board. What this balance meant to Sparta is made clear by her whole policy since the rise of the Athenian Empire. She was always sensible of the need to check its growth, yet always reluctant to act. Her reluctance, besides the internal conditions already mentioned, was also inspired by a fear of the consequences which a too thorough overthrow of Athens might have upon the balance of power. For, if Corinth and Thebes were indispensable as counterpoises to Athens, Athens was equally indispensable as a counterpoise to them. No clearer demonstration

of this could be desired than the one afforded by Sparta's attitude on the surrender of Athens in 404. "The Corinthians and the Thebans, together with the other allies, demanded her utter destruction. But the Lacedaemonians said, Nay: they would never enslave a Hellenic city which had wrought great good in the greatest dangers that had ever threatened Hellas." That is how Xenophon tells the story (*Hellenica*, II. ii, 19-20). However, it is not hard to translate Sparta's magnanimity into realistic terms: it was not a Spartan interest to push dismemberment of Athens to the extreme. Her moderation in taking advantage of victory was of a piece with her deliberation in taking offence.¹

Nor did Sparta enter upon the War without first exhausting every means of procuring from Athens concessions which would have obviated hostilities: concessions which, were it not for Pericles, the Athenians might have made. Here also Thucydides' account bears the stamp of authenticity: he does not depict the Athenians as being, any more than the Spartans, on the look-out for a *casus belli*—in fact, he depicts them as animated by an even stronger desire to avoid a rupture, and only acting under pressure from Pericles, who, in

¹ On Sparta's foreign policy there is no difference of opinion. Its general character and the circumstances which conditioned it are recognised both by Mr. Cornford and, more fully, by Dr. Grundy: see especially the latter's admirable paper in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. xxviii. part i. (1908). The difference lies in the conclusions drawn therefrom.

his turn, seeing his imperialist edifice threatened, felt compelled to fight in its defence. If ever there was an inevitable collision of forces, it is the Peloponnesian War as interpreted by Thucydides, who, further, shows us Sparta's political apprehensions combining with Corinth's commercial jealousy, but as a larger quantity combines with a lesser. In his pages we find, just as we do in life, economic and other motives bound up together, and in their usual proportions. We, in these times, have seen that the commercial spirit played only a secondary part in the Great War : some of the Powers did not fight for markets at all, and others fought for other things besides markets.

Likewise, in Thucydides' considered opinion, the Epidamnian and Potidaean affairs, which loomed so large in the public eye, were not the causes, but the occasions of the Peloponnesian War—just as the Servian and Belgian affairs were not the causes but the occasions of the Great War : they did little more than accelerate an inevitable crisis. Experience also bears out Thucydides' account of the apparently self-contradictory diplomatic manoeuvres of the Powers concerned—offers to submit disputes to arbitration, suggested compromises, and so forth—which led to the very rupture they seemed intended to avert. They were among the attempts, always made by nations, to put their adversaries in the wrong—to show that they are not the aggressors,

that the "guilt" is on the other side, that theirs is the cause of right and justice : a moral asset of considerable value ; for, after all, human beings have a conscience as well as a stomach (I. 36, 140 ; VII. 18).

Such is Thucydides' presentment of the genesis of the Peloponnesian War, through all the antecedent stages up to the actual outbreak. In substance and in spirit it reads not so much like the testimony of a contemporary as like the judgment of history. Of course, the author presupposes in his readers familiarity with circumstances which at the time were perfectly well understood, and also in readers of all times some acquaintance with the elements of international politics, without which no history can ever be understood. But when this is allowed for, it will be found that Thucydides expounds with great precision the causes which determined the policy of the contending parties ; and those who followed the entire train of events through the decade which preceded the Great War will have no difficulty in accepting his reading of the whole situation as the true one.

Not less true rings the historian's exposition of the factors which determined the attitude of neutral states towards the combatants. At first the general sympathy, he tells us, was strongly with the Lacedaemonians ; for they professed to be fighting for the liberation of Greece, while the general

indignation against the Athenians was intense ; some longing to be delivered from their rule, others afraid of falling under it (II. 8). These feelings, however, were complicated and, to a large extent, countered, by special features—social, political, and geographical—which ultimately impelled neutrals in the direction of Sparta or Athens as the case might be.

Every city throughout Greece was divided into democratic and aristocratic parties—a perpetual class-war which in normal times was of a purely domestic nature ; but now that both sides found allies ready to hand, they proved only too willing to invite foreign aid. Gradually everywhere the rival factions were identified with the belligerents ; the chiefs of the democracy struggling to bring in the Athenians, and the chiefs of the aristocracy the Lacedaemonians (III. 82). States, too, which had mutual differences sought by espousing the one cause or the other to serve their own (II. 68, III. 94, 100, 102). Lastly, Thucydides shows how most of those who fought with or against the Athenians in Sicily—where the latter were attacking people as democratic as themselves—chose their sides less from a sense of right or from a sentiment of kinship, than from interest ; while some, being islanders, had to follow the masters of the sea. (VII. 55, 57-59).

This shrewd, realistic analysis of national motives

—in telling contrast with oratorical appeals to racial ties (I. 124 ; VI. 80, 82)—runs throughout the History. We must accept it as correct, since it both accords with necessity and will, so far as our experience goes, bear the criterion of universality.

On the whole, it may be said that, in the historian's view, there are no wars of races or of ideas, but only wars of interests. Where the conflict is between faction and faction, the respective leaders may pose as champions of constitutional ideals ; but, while fighting in the name of a principle, they really fight for a prize. The same as to the conflict between state and state. Although affinity of race or of institutions may have some little influence,¹ in general the policy of states runs on other than sentimental or idealistic lines. Its goal is power, pursued for the gratification of covetousness and ambition.

The pursuit may be successful, provided it is directed by that calm, sane and sagacious judgment which, regarding means as well as ends, does not allow states to reach after more than they can grasp, or to grasp more than they can hold. Unfortunately states, like individuals, often take courses in which the place of judgment is usurped by passion, and adventurous recklessness does duty for sober calculation. Among the conditions which bring on such an aberration perhaps the most

¹ For instances see III. 86, 2 ; V. 31, 6 ; VII. 57, 4.

favourable is excessive prosperity, particularly when it comes suddenly and unexpectedly. Then, intoxicated by their good luck, men grow insolent, over-confident, foolhardy. They crave for what lies beyond their means, and the craving begets not only a hope but a certainty of success. In that state of exaltation they make to themselves illusions powerful enough to prevail over the visible dangers : they refuse to contemplate even the possibility of failure : because they have met with extraordinary good luck, they suppose that every card they play will be a winning one : the future is theirs and the fulness thereof. Although men by themselves are subject to such fits, they are more liable when acting collectively : then the extravagance of each is intensified, because he shares it with all the rest. But cupidity is a normal motive of the policy of states : ruin comes when it assumes the morbid proportions of concupiscence (III. 39, 45 ; IV. 65 ; VI. 11, 13, 24).¹

¹ The somewhat poetical language in which these observations are occasionally couched has led the author of *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (pp. 123, 201 foll.) to find in the historian's mind traces of "the supernatural quality of the elementary human passions." To be sure, Thucydides uses, as we all of us do every day, metaphors which have become inseparable from our speech : the phraseology of supernaturalism lives on the lips of men long after the beliefs associated with it have died out of their minds. But I fancy we shall be nearer the mark if we take the historian to have had in his mind the profound psychological truth, that men's desires reacting to external conditions are apt to become fatally irresistible : in other words, that the passionate side of their nature when unduly stimulated overpowers the rational ; and he calls this universal experience "each condition being in the grip of something incurable overmastering" (III. 45).

A signal example of such infatuation is the Sicilian campaign ; and the historian by his exposition of its aims affords us a signal proof of his acumen. For all men, both in his own time and in succeeding ages, the struggle between Sparta and Athens begun in 431 had ended in 421, and the outbreak of hostilities in 413 marked the beginning of a new conflict. Thucydides alone perceived that the two wars were one—that the Peace of Nikias was but an interlude : the adversaries had only paused to draw breath before resuming their duel. He could hardly apply the term “ peace ” to a state of things in which neither party gave up all the places stipulated by the treaty, but both violated it ; he could only regard it as a hollow truce (V. 25 -26). We are reminded of the Peace of Amiens, during which one side retained what it had been pledged by the letter of the treaty to give up, and the other indulged in measures contrary to its spirit. Naturally. At this period of the Peloponnesian War the policy of Athens was identical with that of France in the Napoleonic period : to dominate Greece by crushing Sparta ; and the Sicilian campaign was a means to that end. Alcibiades’ plans were much like those which Napoleon adopted in his efforts to dominate Europe by crushing England. He strove to accomplish this object now by direct attacks, now by the more circuitous path of subduing the Sicilian, Italian and Carthaginian states and bringing all their

forces and resources against the Peloponnesus : those distant territories had to be conquered before Sparta could be touched ; but this done, she could be crushed easily and leave Athens mistress of Greece (VI. 90). The situations are strikingly analogous. But it needed the insight of a philosophic historian to reveal the analogy.

Thucydides' book is not, of course, meant to be a philosophical disquisition. The author exercises his reason for a definite purpose : to explain the events which he describes. Yet it abounds in generalisations, which are not least interesting when at variance with familiar habits of thought. It is, for instance, a favourite axiom in modern "philosophies of history" that the growth of civilisation connotes a development of human nature—development, usually, meaning improvement. Antiquity, as Professor Bury has shown,¹ was innocent of such an idea ; and, we may add, Thucydides offers no exception. His views on the subject, though nowhere stated formally, can be gathered from many passages (e.g. I. 2, 4-9, 22, 84 ; III. 82 ; VIII. 96). He conceives progress as a mere increase of wealth, security, knowledge, and that improvement in manners and morals which goes with them : not as implying any progressive development of human nature. Human nature indeed adapts itself

¹ *Ancient Greek Historians*, pp. 253 foll. ; *The Idea of Progress*, p. 7 foll.

to external conditions—political institutions, education, discipline, and so forth, have a modifying influence : thus communities may differ in character and intellect according to their ways of life, but the modification does not go very deep. Under all surface diversities, mankind possesses the same attributes, mental and moral. The external conditions also vary only within limits. Hence it follows that, by studying the present, we can understand the past and anticipate the future ; for, since the factors—circumstances and human nature—from the conjunction of which historical phenomena result, do not change in essence, the future will, in effect, repeat the present.¹ It will be noticed that this view excludes the modern idea of amelioration not less than the ancient idea of degeneration. To the historian's mind a millennium is as foreign as a golden age. He has no use for theories which have no real basis in observation.

It would not add to our knowledge of Thucydides to probe his mind deeper. Whoever attempts the task will find it stimulating rather than satisfying. A critical inquiry elicits no more than this: he appreciates keenly the fact that it takes two to make history—man and environment. But, while observing how powerfully environment influences the

¹ With the precision of one accustomed to think things out, Thucydides makes it quite clear what he means by repetition : I. 22, 4 ; III. 82, 2.

dispositions and actions of men, he distinguishes what is superficial and transitory from what is essential and immutable ; and, from the uniformity with which, under similar circumstances, similar events succeed each other, he infers that history will always exhibit virtually the same phenomena.

Such, in some of its main features, is Thucydides' philosophy of history : not a popular philosophy, perhaps, and rather painful for thinkers of a certain stamp, to whom sentimentalism and idealism are as the breath of their intellectual nostrils. Nor is it an academic philosophy, inasmuch as it contains none of those recondite tenets which so often invite our attention and elude our comprehension. It is the philosophy of a man who knew the simple facts of life ; and the simple facts of life are the great facts of life.

Philosophy can be a very dangerous thing, and in reckless hands can play havoc with history. Nothing is more common than the tendency to treat historical phenomena in a transcendental spirit. In their revolt against mere biography and anecdotage, many moderns, mostly Germans, have substantially gone back (while imagining that they went forward) to the attitude which prevailed before the disengagement of positive science from metaphysics. It is all the more to the credit of Thucydides that, living in an age when scientists still occupied themselves with problems altogether beyond the reach

of scientific investigation, he did not allow his mind to wander into barren speculations, but kept it with unswerving steadfastness to those lines of thought upon which experience or deductions from experience could be brought to bear profitably. Upon these lines he concentrates his whole attention ; and for the rest he has nothing to do but to take the universe as he finds it.

CHAPTER V

THE PERSONAL FACTOR

Some moderns would limit the study of history to the forces which govern the action of states, because these approximate more closely to the operation of causes in the physical world and can therefore more readily be grouped under "laws." It is fortunate for us that Thucydides, having never theorised about history, did not set himself any such limits; but, following that surer sight which is given by direct and unbiassed observation of life, he paid equal attention to the forces which govern the action of individual statesmen. The significance of a great man has never, of course, been ignored by anyone who has not fallen victim to the fatal passion for abstractions: indeed, writers have often cut the knot of interpretation by reducing history to a procession of heroes. But Thucydides—the point merits notice—gives his full due, as a determining influence, also to the un-great man.

By so doing he guards us against a very common source of perplexity. Frequently a well-informed observer of international affairs, reasoning on the

real interests of a certain country and its resources, expects it to act in one way—only to find it act in the contrary way : as if some mysterious power took an ironical joy in making sport of his anticipations. The truth is that he has left out of his account a very important element : mistaken notions of that country's rulers about its real interests and resources ; their anxiety to do the popular thing, maybe against their own judgment ; subordination of public to private or party interest ; rashness, vanity, pique—all those psychological forces which cannot be studied in the abstract, and the imperfect knowledge of which creates so many historical puzzles. Thucydides never loses sight of this element, with the result that the course of events, as described by him, is always intelligible.

I do not know how the legend has arisen that Thucydides seldom mentions personal motives. Few historians, ancient or modern, have shown less hesitation in searching the hearts of their fellows : “ This was a mere rhetorical display of public spirit : the truth was that most of them were actuated by their own ambitions ” (VIII. 89). What he says here about a group of Athenian politicians may be taken as typical of his attitude towards leading men at Sparta and Athens alike. Scarcely any escape his dissecting knife : there is something almost brutal in the clearness of his cuts.

The Lacedaemonian general Brasidas and the

Athenian demagogue Cleon were opposed to peace ; the former because war brought him glory, the latter because he thought that in quiet times his rogueries would be more easily detected and his calumnies less easily credited. On the other hand, Pleistoanax and Nikias were anxious to end the war. The Lacedaemonian king longed for peace, because his enemies made capital out of every disaster by attributing it to his illegal restoration. The Athenian general is depicted to us as one of those cautious players who are disposed to be content with certain winnings rather than to go on doubling the stakes : he did not wish to jeopardise the military reputation which he had already gained ; he would have liked to rest from toil and to give his country rest, too. Yet, yielding to popular clamour, he undertook an expedition of which he thoroughly disapproved. The homely portrait of this respectable, middle-aged soldier is a grateful set-off to that of Alcibiades—that restless young prodigal whose passion for showy adventure and tortuous diplomacy cost his country so dear. He opposed a rapprochement with Sparta, partly because he sincerely believed in a different policy, but also because he was piqued at the Lacedaemonians' preference for Nikias. Later we find his antagonism to the elder man impelling him to give the Sicilian project his enthusiastic support, though on that occasion he was actuated by other motives as well : the desire

to be a conqueror and to repair his fortunes, damaged by extravagant living (V. 16-17, 43; VI. 15). These pronouncements will suffice to show how Thucydides took the measure of the men who were shaping the destinies of Greece in his time.

Exceptions there are. The Lacedaemonian king Archidamus favoured a policy of peace solely and simply from a conviction that his country had everything to gain by putting off the evil day; and having entered upon the war with reluctance, he prosecuted it without vigour, in the hope that the Athenians would yield (I. 79-85; II. 12, 18). His personal friend and national adversary Pericles also comes out clear of any petty motives, such as were imputed to him. Apparently Thucydides found no data on which that view could repose and, without even noticing current gossip (one of the characteristics of his work is the total absence of rubbish) he represents Pericles as advising war, because he really thought that war was unavoidable: the choice for Athens lay between fighting and forfeiting her position; concessions would only be interpreted as a sign of fear and provoke greater demands. That being so, better meet trouble half way. Such, in Pericles' judgment, was the action dictated by the interests of Athens, and her resources were equal to it: she had the money and the ships; her command of the sea, by giving her an unlimited control of supplies, enabled her to hold out

indefinitely and to win in time by a process of wearing down the enemy (I. 140-144 ; II. 13, 61-62). Here we have a clearly conceived and resolutely argued policy based upon rational calculation, pure and simple. The course of Athens under Pericles' guidance, whatever else it may have been, was as amenable to logical reasoning as was that of Germany under the guidance of Bismarck. But the Pericleses and the Bismarcks are few, and the charlatans who call themselves statesmen many.

With rare exceptions, it will be seen that Thucydides explains the actions of individuals, as of states, from the main ground of self-interest. Had he then no higher standard ? Those who dislike him answer with decision, No. " It is more than likely that with the belief in the religion of his day, and the belief in rewards and punishments from on high, Thucydides abandoned the belief in the intrinsic worth of moral excellence."¹ Those who admire him sorrowfully admit the probability that " Thucydides' speculative ethics found a difficulty in the conception of a strictly ' unselfish ' action."²

It is not so easy to determine the moral as the intellectual standpoint of a writer from the impress left by him on his work—especially of a writer who never utters a word about " speculative ethics "

¹ J. P. Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, vol. ii., p. 120.

² Gilbert Murray, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature*, p. 199.

or anything else speculative ; and a decision may profitably be postponed. In this place it will be enough to point out that Thucydides was not a doctrinaire, but looked facts squarely in the face. Unvexed with theories, he was under no obligation or temptation to torture realities into conformity with the subjective exigencies of his own mind. As for the extent to which his religious unbelief and unbelief in rewards had affected his belief in the *intrinsic* worth of virtue (the connection is not very obvious), we may guess it from his references to Nikias. After relating the Sicilian catastrophe in a strictly impersonal manner, he relaxes for a moment to express his compassion for the unfortunate general : " Of all the Greeks of my time he least deserved so miserable an end." From a writer of Thucydides' temper the slightest display of feeling would have been remarkable ; and what was there in Nikias to elicit so emphatic a tribute ? Thucydides tells us : " his unremitting practice of every recognised virtue " (VII. 86). Even here the praise is qualified by the epithet " recognised " —we see the limitations of Nikias : his standard was the conventional one. But he lived up to it. In talent he might be inferior to many : he possessed, however, the integrity which dwarfs talent : a man whose heart gave birth only to honourable desires and whose mouth uttered only what he believed to be right. Not a hero, but that rarest product

of humanity—an honest, worthy man. Therefore the historian lingers over his memory with something not unlike affection.¹ Perhaps he would have lingered oftener if there were more men like Nikias in the world.

But, one hears a chorus of expostulation, What about Antiphon? Quite so. Let us see what there is about Antiphon to pother.

Antiphon was the chief contriver of the plot which overthrew the Athenian democracy in 411 B.C. Thucydides traces, with unsparing candour, the whole foul enterprise step by step—from the initial conspiracy, through the stages of secret assassination and terrorism, to the final stroke of an open tyranny. Yet he gives Antiphon a testimonial which Aristides himself would not have disdained: “a man second to none of his contemporary Athenians in virtue” (VIII. 68).

How Thucydides could extol the “virtue” of such a scoundrel seemed to Dr. Thomas Arnold “extraordinary.” But, he surmised, “Thucydides, no doubt, allowed his personal feelings towards his old instructor to influence his general impression of his character.”² Others prefer to surmise that,

¹ A very different reading of Thucydides’ attitude towards Nikias will be found in Professor J. B. Bury’s *Ancient Greek Historians*, p. 119. The opinions of so learned and judicious a writer are entitled to peculiar deference, and even while dissenting from many of them I cannot but admire the ability with which they are expounded.

² Note on VIII. 68, 1.

when the historian applied the term *ἀρετή* to Antiphon, he must have used it in a non-ethical sense—in the sense of ability. Machiavelli's praise of Cesare Borgia's *virtù* inevitably suggests itself.¹

Thus commentators tie themselves up in tapes of their own making, in order, it would seem, to show how cleverly they can undo the knots. To get at the truth, we must first get rid of commentatorial tapes.

(1) There is no evidence that Antiphon was the instructor of Thucydides—only a conjecture to that effect by a rhetorician of the Roman period: a very different thing.² (2) Although the word *ἀρετή*, like its English equivalent "virtue," admits of a variety of meanings, there is nothing to suggest that Thucydides applied it to Antiphon in any but its ordinary meaning—moral excellence—as he does in speaking of Nikias.³

Having thus got back to the bare text, where is the mystery? One is apt to think of goodness as

¹ Jowett, *Thucydides*, vol. ii. pp. 501-502; Forbes, *Thucydides*, pp. 158-159; Mahaffy, *op. cit.* pp. 84, 120; G. Murray, *op. cit.* p. 198; Bury, *op. cit.* p. 145.

² Καικίλιος δ' ἐν τῷ περὶ αὐτοῦ συντάγματι Θουκυδίδου τοῦ συγγραφέως καθηγητὴν τεκμαίρεται γεγόνειν ἐξ ὧν ἐπαινεῖται παρ' αὐτῷ ὁ Ἀντιφῶν.—"Plut." *Antiphon*, 1. *X Oratorum Vitae*. This guess seems to be the original source of the tradition found in Marcellinus (p. 4), in the anonymous biographer of Thucydides (p. 12), and in the anonymous *Ἰένος Ἀντιφώντος* prefixed to that orator's works.

³ The *τε . . . καὶ* shows without the least ambiguity that the man's abilities (mental and oratorical powers) are treated as distinct from and additional to his *ἀρετή*. The *ἀρετή γῆς* (I. 2), which has been quoted in support of a non-ethical signification, is just as relevant as its English equivalent "the goodness of the land"—"the virtue has gone out of the soil."

incompatible with crime ; but Thucydides, who never lets his mind be muddled by confused thinking and never lets the reader's mind be misled by half-statements, feels that Antiphon's character must be viewed on all sides. In public life a bitter and unscrupulous politician, in private life he was an upright, virtuous man (assuredly no rare occurrence in history !)—a good man who did bad things. Not without provocation : Thucydides carefully notes that he had suffered in his ambition by the distrust which the multitude entertained towards him on account of his eminent abilities—a baulked genius. That is what this vexed passage yields when read by the unaided eye of commonsense.

The sole question that remains to consider is : Does the attribution of motives by Thucydides correspond with reality ? Only one who has attempted to write history, and to write it honestly, can estimate how delicate and difficult is this part of a historian's business : how strong is the temptation to let imagination supply the deficiencies of knowledge. Few men are aware of all their motives ; fewer still will disclose any but those which do them credit : it takes a very great man to confess his littleness—and he generally does not do so except in his posthumous memoirs. The motives of individuals can only be deduced from observation—a sustained and minute scrutiny—of their conduct, which reveals their character.

Thucydides was well placed for such observation : it is probable that his social position had early brought him into more or less close intercourse (intimacy would hardly be the word for a person of his temperament) with the men who were making the history of his time, and we may depend upon it that during the War he missed no opportunity of studying carefully the chief actors. He thus had the means of knowing—as far as such knowledge is humanly possible—the springs by which they were moved ; even where the motive of a particular act was unknown, he could from his general knowledge of their characters infer it with comparative certainty and assert it with the splendid audacity of the Frenchman who, on being challenged, coolly declared : “ *Je ne le sais pas, mais je l'affirme.*”

Of course, Thucydides does not pretend to omniscience. When, for instance, King Pleistoanax evacuated Attica, everyone, including his own countrymen, thought that he had been bribed by the Athenian Government to do so : Thucydides records the story without affirming it (II. 21 ; V. 16)¹.

¹ Other writers showed greater assurance, and Plutarch, following them, enriches the story with an interesting detail, which, if authentic, would prove that in matters of this sort even the Athenian Assembly could be as discreet as any modern Parliament : “ Pericles, in giving an account of his command, put down an item of 10 talents as ‘ spent for needful purposes ’ (*eis τὸ δέον*, the stock phrase for *secret service*), and the Demos accepted the statement without inquiring too curiously into the secret.”—*Pericles*, xxiii.

Again, why did King Archidamus give the Athenians time to get away their property, and later why did he linger about Acharnae? Thucydides, having no "inside information," simply reports what "was said" (II. 18, 20). In like manner, he leaves us to speculate on the motives which prompted King Agis' sudden retreat from Argos (V. 60), and does no more than suggest those which *may* have induced Agesandridas to hover about Epidaurus (VIII. 94). See also the lengthy passage in which he first enumerates the various theories advanced to explain why the Persian satrap Tissaphernes did not go to the help of the Peloponnesians, then sets forth his own view—that the Persian's policy was to play the Greeks off against one another and so keep all of them in a balance of impotence—supporting this view with several reasons, but ending with the admission that the whole matter was obscure (VIII. 87): the author had nothing to go upon except the facts; and his avowed inability to reach a definite conclusion, as well as the amount of inquiry and thought he spent in the effort, give us confidence that, when he speaks positively, he knows what he is talking about—that he does not just attribute motives in accordance with the suggestions of the facts.

But knowledge is not everything. Did Thucydides

also possess that fairness of mind which is equally necessary for a true presentation ? Here again the chief witness to the historian's fidelity is the historian himself. We have seen how highly he esteemed Nikias ; yet, while paying a tribute to his sterling worth as a citizen, he exposes without mercy those weaknesses—inertness, indecision, superstition—which incapacitated him for command. In Antiphon we have the two sides of the man's moral nature stated with an equitableness so unexpectedly simple that it has bewildered students. The same quality is apparent in his dealing with a person devoid of any moral nature. For Alcibiades Thucydides had the feelings natural to a judge for a criminal : his sketch of him is very illuminating on this point and full of suggestive detail. Yet he recognises the young man's brilliant gifts, records his important service to the state on a critical occasion, and intimates—what we should not perhaps have thought for ourselves—that the people's want of confidence in his character, by thwarting his ambition and threatening his life, was one of the chief factors that brought Athens to ruin—not because, as has been supposed, Thucydides considered Alcibiades a military genius who would have conducted the War better than those to whom its conduct was entrusted by the Athenians, but because their unmeasured and, on a specific count, unmerited hostility created a schism and drove

the unprincipled adventurer to use his talents for intrigue against his own country.¹

Significant, also, is the historian's attitude towards Pericles. He appreciates that statesman's personality and emphatically commends that part of his policy which concerns the War, though he evinces the reverse of sympathy with his political system.

From these examples we obtain an adequate idea of Thucydides' anxiety not to let any consideration interfere with the performance of what is the first duty of a historian: to lay bare men's actions, as he understands them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions.

But, it has been said, to understand the actions of men completely we want to know more about their characters than Thucydides tells us: in regard to persons, as in regard to facts, he carries elimination too far, stating only those qualities which he considers relevant, but which we feel to be insufficient. Thus, despite all he tells us about him, Pericles, owing to the omission of biographical

¹ The language of VI. 15, 4, at a casual reading, might perhaps suggest what, for instance, it suggested to Jowett, "his talents as a military commander were unrivalled." But Alcibiades, to judge by his very slight military record (V. 52, 53, 55), had had no opportunity of showing any such talents. The words *κράτιστα διαθέντι τὰ τοῦ πολέμου*—"he had most ably arranged the affairs of the war"—read in the light of the facts stated by himself (VI. 16, 6-17, 1) must be taken as referring to the alliances he had formed against Sparta by his diplomacy; in the Sicilian expedition also Alcibiades relies entirely on his talents for intrigue (VI. 17, 2-5; 48; 50, 1). Likewise, *ἄλλοις ἐπιτρέψαντες* is, I believe, to be taken not as referring specially to the administration of the war, but in a more general sense.

details, still is "in many respects an unknown or at least ambiguous quantity": so much so that the most diverse estimates of him are formed by students.¹

To me the criticism seems to rest on a confusion between the desirable and the attainable. If the personality of Pericles remains enigmatical, this assuredly is not due to paucity of biographical data: Plutarch supplies such data in abundance: yet they do not solve the enigma. And the same is the case with many other historical personages, modern no less than ancient, whom, their biographers' exuberance notwithstanding, we see alternately extolled and arraigned. How can it be otherwise? To appraise any man—however intimately we may know him—even proximately, is very difficult, and to appraise him with complete accuracy is impossible.

Indeed, one may ask whether a fuller delineation of character might not have defeated its own object—whether by multiplying details the writer might not have obscured the dominant qualities. Such undoubtedly would have been the feeling of those for whose eyes and ears the History was designed. Even in their drama the Greeks refrained from minute elaboration lest it should interfere with the lucid expression of primary motives.

At all events, in attaching great importance to

¹ Bury, *op. cit.* p. 147.

the characters of the small as well as of the great men who played leading parts in the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides showed his good sense ; while by exhibiting, for instance, Nikias' mediocrity, Pericles' patriotic wisdom, and Alcibiades' unscrupulous egoism, he enables us to understand why things happened as they did : from any other point of view their characters are a matter hardly concerning either the historian or his readers. The principle upon which he accentuates the virtues of the first two and the vices of the third is obvious : these qualities were among the causes which decided their position in the state. If in speaking of Antiphon he alludes to a personal quality which has no relation to the man's public action, he presumably does so because, in that case, silence would have been inconsistent with fairness.

Like the characters of his actors, their careers also occupy Thucydides only so far as they contribute to the History and no further. He never turns aside to notice, unless—as in the case of Alcibiades—the matter has a bearing on the course of events, the private lives of public men. Such information he evidently felt to be extraneous to his work. History and biography have each their own appropriate spheres : in biography persons form the main theme, and nothing regarding them is out of place ; in history they are important only as they influence events.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEMAGOGUE

On the whole, Thucydides' judgments of individuals have carried as much weight as the author would himself have wished. The objection, indeed, is sometimes heard that he rather inclines to see the worst of a man—that his verdict seldom errs on the side of leniency; but such impressions will vary indefinitely, according to the sympathies of the reader.

In one case, however, his fairness has been seriously impugned.

The facts, briefly, are as follows. In the seventh year of the War the Athenians beat the Peloponnesians in the bay of Pylos and then blockaded Sphacteria—a densely wooded little island at the mouth of the bay—on which a Lacedaemonian force, consisting in large proportion of Spartan citizens, was pent up. The Spartan government, seeing no way of saving their men, offered peace. But the Athenians, elated at their success, and looking upon the men on the island as a certain prize, were persuaded to reject these overtures by Cleon, the popular leader who had at the time the

greatest influence with the multitude. The besieged, however, managed to obtain provisions : the summer wore on, and still there was no sign of surrender—the storms of winter might necessitate the raising of the blockade. At Athens public feeling ran high. In the Assembly which met to discuss the situation Cleon had to face the reproaches of a disappointed populace and the attacks of his political opponents, led by Nikias. But he won through : The muddle, he declared, was entirely due to the supineness of Nikias and the other members of the Board of Generals : Sphacteria might easily be taken : *he* would take it, if he had the command. The command having been given to him, Cleon chose as his colleague Demosthenes, who was conducting the operations on the spot, and set out at once, pledging his word that he would either kill or capture the men on the island in twenty days. And, sure enough, in twenty days he was back at Athens with the surviving Spartans as his prisoners.

Thucydides ends the story with the comment, “and so Cleon’s undertaking came off, insane though it was” (IV. 39). It seems hardly a fair comment. The enterprise does not strike one as so very extraordinary : a few hundred men, exposed, since a recent fire had burnt down the woods, to the missiles of a whole army. Even allowing for the respect which the mere shadow of a Spartan soldier inspired, we rather wonder that Demosthenes had

not finished the job straightway. In short, to the candid mind Cleon is entitled to some credit for having seen and done the obvious. Yet Thucydides calls him mad. (Cleon might have deserved that epithet, had he, a man without any military experience, undertaken to carry out the operation by himself; but he specially asked that Demosthenes should be associated with him, "aware that the latter was already meditating a descent upon the island.") Nor has the historian at any time anything to say about Cleon which Cleon would have been pleased to hear.

How is this to be accounted for?

Grote, speaking on Cleon's behalf, cites "with reluctance, though not without belief," a statement made by one of Thucydides' biographers that Cleon caused his exile, "and has therefore received from him harder measure than was due in his capacity of historian."¹ It is, of course, not improbable that Cleon was the loudest among those who denounced Thucydides for the loss of Amphipolis. But this is a mere supposition; and such, in the absence of evidence, it must remain. The statement to which Grote refers does not occur in any ancient author. Neither Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who flourished during the age of Augustus and who published elaborate treatises on Thucydides, nor another Greek, whose anonymous "Life" of the historian

¹ Grote's *History of Greece*, vol.v., pp. 264 foll., 329 foll., 390 foll.

is still extant, knew anything about it, though they both allude to his supposed grudge against the Athenians. It occurs only in the biography which bears the name of Marcellinus—or rather in the second of the three fragments which make up that literary farrago : three fragments destitute of mutual connection, but sufficiently provided with mutual contradictions. The passage upon which Grote hit runs : “ He was banished by the Athenians, Cleon having calumniated him, wherefore he hates Cleon and introduces him everywhere as raging and empty-headed ” (p. 9). We gather that, if Cleon had treated the writer as he is said to have treated Thucydides, the writer could never have forgiven him. But was Thucydides quite like the writer ? The preceding fragment says something different : “ unlike many who composed their histories in accordance with their private passions,” Thucydides, his exile notwithstanding, “ wrote without any vindictive feeling towards the Athenians, but in a spirit of perfect truthfulness and fairness, since neither Cleon nor Brasidas, the cause of his misfortune, received from him any abuse, as they would, if the author bore malice ” (p. 5). Clearly, Marcellinus can give no help to Grote, beyond the hint about Cleon being responsible for Thucydides’ expatriation ; and even that hint seems to us much less precious than it does to Grote, who, by accepting “ in this case ” an essay

of the 5th century A.D.—and such an essay, too—as “quite sufficient authority” on an occurrence of the 5th century B.C. only shows how far the ablest of advocates can let zeal for a favourite client impair their appreciation of evidence.¹

Grote himself seems aware that he is skating on very thin ice ; for he hastens to glide on to safer ground. The unfavourable judgment of Cleon, he remarks, was not peculiar to Thucydides, but was shared by all those whom, for want of a better name, he calls the “oligarchical” party at Athens, “and it gives us some measure of the prejudice and narrowness of vision which prevailed among that party at the present memorable crisis : so pointedly contrasting with the clear-sighted and resolute calculations, and the judicious conduct in action, of Kleôn.” We need not follow Grote any further in his enthusiastic championship of this politician. Let us rather state our own view of the case.

¹ I trust that in pointing to this lapse I shall not be suspected of any presumptuous wish to detract aught from the great and enduring merits of an author who knew more about ancient Greece and imagined less than most scholars. My respect for Grote's learning is so profound that I might easily have believed him if he told me that there was “quite sufficient authority” which I had never seen ; but when he produces his authority, and it turns out to be no other than my old friend Marcellinus, I conceive that I am perfectly competent to pronounce on its value. Personally I should have preferred a hint from Thucydides himself ; but the only one I can find is too slender for judicial purposes—the historian's statement that Cleon liked war because in peace time “his calumnies would be less credible” (V. 16). It would not surprise me, however, to learn that Marcellinus' *διαβάλλοντος αὐτὸν τοῦ Κλεῶνος* was spun out of Thucydides' own *διαβάλλον*.

We agree that party division entered very largely into the affair of Sphacteria ; but it was no mere party spirit that divided the public. A great question of national policy was involved. From the time of Kimon and Themistocles onwards, the two parties represented opposite schools : the leaders of the aristocratic party were for maintaining amicable relations with the rest of Greece and for expansion at the expense of Persia in concert with Sparta ; the leaders of the democratic party were for extending the Athenian dominion over the rest of Greece, which inevitably meant a standing quarrel, or rather a war to the death, with Sparta.¹ This divergence pervades the foreign politics of Athens, and we may picture it as assuming special prominence at the present crisis. The “oligarchs”—or, as we might more accurately call them, the “moderates”—were for a peace by negotiation ; the “democrats”—or, as we might more accurately call them, the “extremists”—were for, to use another familiar and expressive phrase of our own day, “the knock-out blow” policy. So far as the leaders at the time were concerned, we have seen how Thucydides explains their respective attitudes. But his diagnosis, however

¹ The rival policies are illustrated by Kimon's earnest appeal for aid to Sparta in the revolt of the Helots and by Themistocles' proposal for the destruction of the Spartan fleet.—Plut. *Kimon*, xvi. ; *Aristides*, xxii.

correct with regard to Nikias and Cleon, cannot obviously apply to either party as a body. Nikias' supporters, no doubt, thought that by accepting the Spartan offer, when fortune smiled upon her, Athens would have won not only an honourable peace, but also the gratitude of all Greeks, including that of the Spartans themselves. By rejecting it, she would not only commit herself to a prolongation of hostilities without the prospect of any gains commensurate with the inevitable sacrifices, but she would run the risk of having eventually to make peace on less advantageous terms. Hence, we may fairly conjecture, their exaggerated estimate of the difficulties attending a descent upon Sphacteria: they did not want an empty triumph which, by puffing up one side and exasperating the other, would wreck all hope of reconciliation. Cleon's adherents, on the other hand, regarding the success already gained as a mere instalment of what was to come, set their faces against any compromise. The modest advantages of a reasonable bargain had no charm for them: they were ready to risk all for the gratification of a vainglorious jingoism which in their own eyes, doubtless, was the highest and purest patriotism. It must be remembered that this was the time when, according to Thucydides, the vision of a widespread empire, including the conquest of Sicily, had begun to dazzle many Athenians, and that the expedition of which the

Sphacteria episode was a by-product had for its ultimate destination Sicily.¹

Now, if anything stands out in the work of Thucydides, it is a conviction of the uncertainties of war, and an abhorrence of the gamester spirit : of that thoughtless optimism which, combined with greed, blinds men to realities and lures them to their ruin. Trust to luck as little as possible, and do not throw away actual advantages in a wild chase for problematical gains. Such is the note sounded by various speakers on a great variety of occasions (I. 78, 82, 84 ; II. 62 ; III. 39, 45 ; IV. 17-18 ; V. 103, 111 ; VI. 9, 13, 23), and the author's own direct observations (IV. 65, 108 ; VIII. 2, 24) leave no doubt that he was all for that sober policy which is based not on hope, but on cool calculation. We may therefore take it that he shared with the "oligarchs," not only their view of Cleon, but also their view of the policy for which Cleon stood. That being so, his treatment of the Sphacteria exploit becomes explicable : the more explicable when examined in the light of his treatment of that other exploit which immediately preceded and led to it.

Thucydides describes the occupation of Pylos as the result of a fortuitous concatenation of lucky

¹ If *καρχηδών* be the correct reading in Aristophanes' *Knights* (174, 1303), which was produced in 424 B.C., even Carthage came within the range of Athenian ambition now, as it did ten years later (VI. 15, 90).

accidents. Yet from the facts supplied by himself a critical reader sees pretty clearly that, although luck did favour the operation, it was by no means the pure freak of fortune which he represents it. Demosthenes had acted on a pre-meditated design: while the Spartans harried Attica by annual raids, he would establish a permanent fortified post within their own territory. He had fixed for the purpose upon Pylos—an uninhabited bluff in the old Messenia—which he intended to garrison with the descendants of Messenian exiles from Naupactus, Athens' friends and Sparta's hereditary enemies. It is impossible to resist the conclusion that he had evolved this plan during the previous year when he cruised round the Peloponnesus and when he was closely associated with those Messenian settlers at Naupactus (III. 94 foll.), who are now represented as turning up at Pylos, with an exceptionally opportune stock of arms, as if by chance! (IV. 9). Another stroke of luck which carries even graver suspicion on the face of it is connected with the capture of Sphacteria. Thucydides tells us that Demosthenes in this operation was chiefly guided by the recollection of "his disaster in Aetolia, which had been in a considerable measure caused by the forest" (IV. 30). Now, on turning to the narrative of that disaster, we find that the Athenians who had rushed into a forest were not destroyed until the Aetolians

“burnt it round them” (III. 98). Yet, while reflecting on the advantage which the forest gave the Spartans in Sphacteria, Demosthenes waited for an accident to set it on fire !

Further, from the fact that Demosthenes was allowed to accompany a fleet which sailed under orders for Sicily with the anomalous permission “to employ the ships, if he so wished, round the Peloponnesus” (IV. 2), we are amply justified in concluding that his plan enjoyed the unofficial sanction of some influential politicians. It would seem that the extremists, unable to push their programme openly, had recourse to indirect methods and found a coadjutor in this general who, though he had retrieved the credit he had lost by the Aetolian disaster sufficiently to be able to show his face in Athens again, was still unemployed and eager to rehabilitate himself. His plan, so well calculated to turn the tables at once upon Sparta and upon the peace party, could not but commend itself to the pro-war politicians who seconded it by procuring him a place in the expeditionary force. This seems a natural reconstruction of the affair—a mixture of military adventure and political intrigue not unlike (*mutatis mutandis*) General Gordon’s mission to Khartoum.

Why then does Thucydides, while furnishing us with the materials for such a reconstruction, convey an entirely different impression ? Personal animus

is out of the question : Demosthenes, the sole hero of the Pylos exploit, is a soldier to whom Thucydides does ample justice. We can easily suppose that he gives us the version as he had it—had it perhaps from Demosthenes himself.¹ In a state where renown often spelt ruin, it was always wise for a commander to disarm envy by crediting his successes to mere luck,² and in the present case Demosthenes may, for obvious reasons, have thought it specially expedient to encourage such a version. But we cannot easily avoid the reflection that Thucydides would have subjected the story to severer scrutiny, had his mind not been strongly predisposed in its favour. What created this predisposition ? Answers come in embarrassing profusion : The historian was carried away by his wish to show how the unexpected happens in war. He maliciously wanted to belittle the Athenians' greatest military achievement. He honestly thought that he saw a mythical agency, called Fortune, at work.³ All these solutions, put forward by various students, only replace one question by another. Unless I am much mistaken, Thucydides

¹ The minuteness with which he describes every operation conducted by this general in various fields has led students to infer the existence of personal relations between the two men : a conjecture natural enough, and probably true.

² We are expressly told by Plutarch that such was the practice of Nikias : τὰ πλείστα κατορθῶν, ὡς εἰκός, εἰς οὐδεμίαν αὐτοῦ σοφίαν ἢ δύναμιν ἢ ἀρετὴν ἀνέφερε τὰς πράξεις, ἀλλὰ παρεχώρει τῇ τύχῃ καὶ κατέφενγεν εἰς τὸ θεῖον τῷ φθόνῳ τῆς δόξης ὑφιέμενος.—*Nikias*, VI.

³ See F. M. Cornford's *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, ch. VI.

treats the capture of Pylos in the same Gilbertian way as he treats the capture of Sphacteria, because both episodes were parts of the same performance—a performance, to an Athenian moderate, the more undesirable by the very completeness of its success.

Let us try to visualise the situation on the eve of the campaign which produced these sensational events. After six years of bloodshed an opportunity had presented itself for statesmanlike deliberation—one of those precious moments when the fate of nations hangs on the use made of it. The struggle so far had resulted in no decisive victory for either side; but Athens had virtually accomplished the object with which she had entered the war—the preservation of her empire; while Sparta had realised that the Athenian empire was a fact which had to be accepted. The spring of 425 B.C. found among both belligerents many citizens war-weary and disposed to an accommodation; and, taking, as we are entitled to take, the appearance of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* just then as a sign of the times, we may conclude that the "defeatists" at Athens were anxious to seize the favourable moment. The play is a transparent piece of political propaganda, aiming at the support of the aristocratic peace-party against the democratic war-party. The success of the Pylos-Sphacteria enterprise reanimated this party and

frustrated the efforts of its opponents, with whom Thucydides sympathised. Confident in the support of a victory-intoxicated mob, Cleon was able to claim the last farthing as the price of peace : instead of thinking how his own country might be extricated from the contest with safety and honour, he thought only how the enemy might be reduced to the lowest possible state of humiliation. In default of any other satisfactory explanation of the historian's loss of his habitual objectivity at the present juncture, we must needs look for one in this fact : he had seen a golden opportunity recklessly gambled away.

Events soon showed which of the two schools deserved to be charged with " narrowness of vision " and to which belonged the epithet " clear-sighted." The victory at Pylos was speedily followed by the defeat at Delion, the capture of Sphacteria by the loss of Amphipolis, Cleon's spectacular success by the series of Brasidas' substantial conquests. For one brief hour Athens had felt intoxicated by beholding the pride of Sparta humbled, and the next she was dismayed at the sight of her most valuable possessions slipping from her grasp. Cleon led an army against Brasidas and perished in the adventure. Such were the fruits of the " clear-sighted and resolute calculations " which had found their loudest spokesman in him. In face of these big issues, the soundness of his appreciation

of the military position at Sphacteria pales into insignificance. If his strategy at a particular juncture was not "insane," certainly his general policy was. Well might the Athenians repent that "after the Pylos affair when they might honourably have done so, they did not come to terms" (V. 14).

How little ground there is for attributing Thucydides' judgment of Cleon to personal enmity may be seen from his still more merciless treatment of Hyperbolus (VIII. 73). As to class or party prejudice, the suggestion loses its force when we consider his attitude towards Alcibiades—an aristocrat who, unlike Cleon in every other respect, yet emulated that demagogue's passion for political gambling, no less than his appreciation of Pericles—a popular leader who did not delude himself and the people into hazardous speculations. Thucydides emphasises this statesman's power of detaching himself from present circumstances and looking ahead, with a due sense of the proportion of things (II. 59-65): indeed, the History suggests the reflection—which Grote himself makes—that Pericles, had he been alive, would have taken a more prudent measure of the future and accepted the Spartan offer. Now, Cleon was so wanting in these qualities that, as we learn from Plutarch, on the first invasion of Attica he distinguished himself among those fire-eaters who, exasperated by the sight of their ravaged farms, denounced Pericles as a coward for not

leading them out against overwhelming odds, and on the second (although here the evidence is not conclusive) among those who, demoralised by the Plague, wanted peace at any price.¹

Was it possible to respect a mob-orator who, susceptible to every passing impression, spoke only with an eye to immediate issues and immediate popularity? That he spoke persuasively made little difference in his favour: no man is more dangerous to a state than he who possesses the gift of persuasion and lacks the faculty of judgment.

Another point equally germane to the question is this: however unfavourable Thucydides' presentation of Cleon may be, it is almost a flattering portrait compared with that painted by Aristophanes. Aristophanes, we grant, was a comedian of aristocratic connection, and had a grudge against Cleon: so, no wonder he held him up to ridicule and contempt. But, after making all allowances for comic exaggeration, for party, class, and personal rancour, we cannot refrain from thinking that his picture is, in its main features, correct: even a caricature, to be effective, must bear a pretty close resemblance to the original. Lastly, the character of Cleon transmitted to us by these contemporaries is corroborated by independent testimony which has come to light since Grote's day. A writer who could not have been swayed by any sort of animus

¹ *Pericles*, XXXIII., XXXV.

and who had sources of information lost to us, wrote: "He seems (*δοκεῖ*) to have, more than anyone else, led the people astray by his impetuosity."¹

To sum up: Given the known data, this part of the History cannot be acquitted of a certain bias. We must face the fact, however much we may deplore it. But this bias appears to spring not from any personal animosity, but from his taking the long view of the situation. Thucydides was assuredly a great historian. But the historian who, holding strong opinions on such a vital matter as peace and war, can altogether maintain his placidity must be more than human; and it is easy to imagine how Thucydides must have felt at the triumph of a policy opposed to all his principles as a statesman and condemned by all his instincts as a man; the rather because (we need not think any the worse of him for that), but for the triumph of that policy, Amphipolis would not have been lost and he would not have become a fugitive from his country.

¹ Arist. *Ἀθην. Πολιτ.* xxviii. The full judicial weight of Aristotle's *δοκεῖ* may be estimated from his careful pronouncement about Theramenes in the same chapter. The doubts cast upon the authorship of this famous little book, *sive doctas eas dicas sive perversas* (as Blass has it), do not diminish its historical value. It is a serious treatise based on exhaustive research and written in a philosophic spirit.

CHAPTER VII

THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

No portion of Thucydides' work has received greater admiration than the eulogy of the Athenian Democracy by Pericles (II. 35 foll.). And it certainly is a magnificent picture of a model state : at once a school for culture and a pattern of civic virtue. Arts and sciences flourish there in an atmosphere of generous freedom and under the protection of equal laws. There public preferment is open to all : the race is handicapped by no privilege, and the prize goes to the best. This democratic system has produced two qualities which distinguish the Athenians above other men. First (I give the points without binding myself to the words), " we are all politicians born and bred ; and, if few of us are capable of initiating, we are all capable of judging a policy." Secondly, " we are all soldiers born, but not bred : valour is innate in us, and without any laborious training we are more than a match for those who from early youth devote themselves to military service." As a result, " whereas to other men it is ignorance that brings daring, we have this characteristic—we are

at the same time most daring and most calculating in our enterprises."

There can be little doubt that this speech, even if it does not reproduce the language, reflects the ideas of the speaker—or at any rate such ideas as the speaker thought suitable to the occasion. But to what extent does it reflect the ideas of the historian? The passages depicting the refinement of a certain side of Athenian life Thucydides very likely endorsed, though he never alludes to that side. On all other points, however, he presents a picture of the Athenian democracy so much at variance with the one presented by Pericles that, had he wished to refute the orator, he could not have done it differently. The presentment deserves careful consideration, not only on its own account, but because it bears closely upon the question of his impartiality; and no one can form a just estimate of Thucydides who has not faced this question fully and found the answer to it.

Let us begin with the claim that everyone in Athens was qualified to deal with politics.

We have seen the light-headed rejection of a favourable opportunity for peace, and the repentance which followed. Another instance of political folly, attended with still more fatal results and still more bitter repentance, we have in the Sicilian expedition. Thucydides tells us how the Athenians rushed into that enterprise blindfold. It was in

vain that Nikias attempted to enlighten them. No facts, figures, or arguments weighed aught against the imperialist greed of an ignorant mob, fanned to white heat by the vapourings of an ambitious young adventurer (VI. 1, 8-24). The enterprise was based on a want of calculation which would perhaps have sufficed to ensure its failure ; but, as though anxious to make assurance doubly sure, the Athenians, instead of devoting their thoughts to it, gave themselves up to civil strife (II. 65). In the circumstances, the inevitable happened : they lost the greater part of their fleet and army ; and then they were furious with the orators who had advocated the expedition and with the soothsayers who had prophesied success (VIII. 1).

So much for the born politicians. Now about the born soldiers. Like all competent military writers, Thucydides sets great store by the human heart—the spirit which moves soldiers ; and he pointedly tells us that the Athenians were quick, bold, self-confident, ready to take any risks (I. 70 ; VII. 21 ; VIII. 96). But, without underrating the value of this spirit, an unprejudiced reader will notice that it is no substitute for discipline. In the Sicilian campaign the Athenians revealed all the defects which might have been expected from amateur troops. They brought to the camp the habits of the agora : their general found it impossible to control them. Intractable at all times, they

became hopelessly demoralised by misfortune. Under the influence of superstition they refused to embark; under the influence of panic they refused to fight; under the influence of impatience they threw themselves pell-mell into a river, with the enemy close behind them (VII. 14, 50, 72, 84). In a word, the morale of the citizen army proved utterly unequal to the demands made upon it, and defeat ended in destruction.

As to Athenian justice, Thucydides had only too much cause to know its quality. Whether he was formally banished or stayed away from Athens to escape a worse fate we cannot tell.¹ It is characteristic of the man that he vouchsafes no details, but only mentions the matter to show that, as an exile, he had exceptional opportunities for studying events. His self-restraint—be it due to pride or to a sense of proportion—has told with posterity more than any self-justification. For over two thousand years students accepted the view conveyed by the bare facts and found in them nothing to his discredit. It was left for Grote to discover

¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Thuc. Hist. Jud.* 41) speaks of *καταδικη*; but his statement, like the anonymous biographer's *αἰτίαν ἔσχε προδοσίας ἐκ βραδυτητός τε καὶ ὀλιγωρίας* (p. 13), does not seem to be more than conjecture, while Marcellinus' *ἐφυγαδέυθη ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων* (p. 9), strikes one as an arbitrary paraphrase of Thucydides' own *ἐνέβη μοι φεύγειν* (V. 26). The passage in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (287-9) where the crazy old judge Philocleon is urged to make an end of "a substantial man, one of those who betrayed the parts towards Thrace," may possibly be to the point. But in such matters the truest wisdom is to recognise that we cannot know.

hidden in those facts an opposite view, which has impressed many. A fresh inquiry may therefore be of interest : not that it can lead to a final decision, but on the principle that, even where certainty is impossible, we should not be satisfied with anything less than the greatest degree of probability attainable.

What Grote's position comes to is briefly this. Thucydides shared with the other general, Eucles, the responsibility for the safety of Amphipolis and should have stationed himself at Eion : had he done so, Brasidas would never have taken the town. The disaster was due to his negligence.¹

Now it is clear from the narrative that the two generals, even if sent as joint commanders—a somewhat doubtful point—had divided their task between them : Thucydides being in command at sea, and Eucles on land. The latter is even expressly described as the “ guardian ” of Amphipolis (φύλαξ τοῦ χωρίου, IV. 104). He was therefore the one best placed for hearing of Brasidas' movements—which were all on land—and of his intrigues with the neighbours and inhabitants of the town. If Eucles had no hint of the imminent danger, how could Thucydides ? and, having no such hint, he remained with his squadron off Thasos.

But why be there at all ? everything, it is agreed, turns on this question, and it is assumed by those

¹ Grote's *History of Greece*, vol. v., pp. 329-334.

who "reserve their judgment" that there may have been some special circumstances which we do not know. If such were the case, I submit, it is very unlikely that Thucydides would not have recorded them. The loss of Amphipolis was, as he himself tells us, an event of the first importance—strategic, political, and economic (IV. 108). For this reason alone, quite apart from any personal consideration, would he, who takes such pains to make each incident of the war as clear as possible, not have explained all the circumstances which led to it? His silence, indeed, has been taken for an admission of culpability. To me it rather indicates that he never thought any explanation necessary: that Thasos was the natural and proper place for him to be at in the course of his duties.

Thucydides was entrusted with the protection of Athenian interests "in the parts towards Thrace" (IV. 104)—a phrase embracing the whole north coast of the Ægean as far east as the Hellespont.¹ "There cannot be a clearer designation of the

¹ Herodotus even applies it to places east of the Hellespont (VI. 33). Jowett's rendering "in Chalcidicè" is as misleading as it is unwarranted. The expression, it is true, was most frequently used with a special reference to the Chalcidic peninsula; but that was simply because Athens had most frequently to do with that portion of the region. In the same way, as Niebuhr long ago pointed out, the poetic name Hesperia embraced the whole West, Iberia no less than Italy; but as what the poets had to tell of Hesperia almost always related to Italy, hardly ever to Iberia, this gave rise to the notion, and to the subsequent usage, which identified Hesperia with Italy (*History of Rome*, vol. I. p. 22).

extensive range of his functions and duties," as Grote very truly remarks, without perceiving the implications—implications founded so much on common sense and obvious reasoning that it is impossible they could altogether have escaped a writer who gives so many proofs of deep penetration, if he had approached the question with an open mind. Not the least of those interests, it goes without saying, and one which fell immediately to the charge of a naval commander, regarded the Straits. Athens depended for her bread very largely on the Black Sea trade, which during the Peloponnesian War played a vital part : as long as the corn ships from the Euxine sailed into the Piræus, the Lacedæmonians might lay waste the fields of Attica without producing any decisive effect,¹ while the loss of the command of the Straits, after the defeat at Aegospotami, dealt the Athenian Empire its death blow. Any intrigue among the subjects of Athens or among the Tracian tribes in that region might imperil the passage of the Straits. Now, situated between the western and the eastern parts, and the eastern it being the duty of Thucydides to watch over as much as the western, Thasos offered the best possible base for that purpose ; and having old scores to pay off, the island, one would think, needed watching as much as any other

¹ The Spartan King Agis learnt this by long experience.—See *Xen. Hellen.* I. i, 35.

spot.¹ Moreover, according to Grote, Thucydides had been given this appointment in consequence of his local influence. Grote has every right to this conjecture; he has, however, no right to fix the historian's sphere of influence "round Amphipolis." We do not know the exact position of the gold-mines, which were the source of that influence; but from his own language it has been commonly, and, as I think, correctly inferred that they lay on the coast opposite Thasos.² Taking all these things together, we can see something of the reasons which determined the choice of station. For the rest, the voyage from Thasos to Amphipolis was merely a matter of "about half a day": so that, had his colleague been reasonably well informed and apprised him of the emergency, Thucydides would have been in ample time to meet it. If anyone was to blame for the enemy's lightning stroke, assuredly it was not the man afloat, but the one ashore.

¹ In point of fact, Thasos did revolt the moment she got the chance (VIII. 64).

² Plutarch connects Thucydides with Skapte Hyle in Thrace (*Kimón* IV., *De Exilio*, 14), and Marcellinus places his mines in that locality (p. 3), where, according to Herodotus (VI. 46), were the gold mines formerly owned by Thasos. Unfortunately, Skapte Hyle is a mere name to us. Thucydides, without naming the place, tells us that the mines wrested from Thasos by the Athenians lay "in the part of Thrace opposite" the island (*ἐν τῇ ἀντιπένεος Θράκης*, I. 100), and, speaking of himself as holder of the gold-mining concession, he uses the expression "in the part of Thrace thereabout" (*ἐν τῇ περὶ ταῦτα Θράκης*, IV. 105), which, following as it does directly the mention of Thasos, countenances the anonymous biographer's statement that "he was entrusted with the mines about Thasos" (*τὰ περὶ Θάσον πιστευθεὶς μέταλλα*, p. 13).

Yet Grote, by a singular perversity of judgment, while condemning the conduct of Thucydides, extenuates that of Eucles. The reason is obvious. Nobody cares a straw, if Eucles suffered, whether his punishment was just or unjust. With Thucydides it is different—his acquittal would automatically convict the Athenian democracy in the eyes of the world ; as indeed it has done for over two thousand years.

Grote's plea, though unsupported by any fresh evidence, but based entirely on his own reading of familiar facts, might have been more impressive, if the case of Thucydides was a solitary one : the harshness of his countrymen might have been excused on psychological grounds. The dismay caused by the loss of so important a place at such a juncture would have predisposed the popular mind to suspect Thucydides of foul play ; and his politics would have turned suspicion into certainty : what more plausible than that a defeatist should play for a defeat ? But the case was not a solitary, or even an unusual, one. The Athenians had a habit of punishing officers who failed, and even, sometimes, officers who succeeded : the Demos could be as bad a winner as a loser.

In 426 Demosthenes, after his discomfiture in Aetolia, dared not come back to Athens (III. 98). In 424 when, the Sicilian states having concluded a general peace, the Athenian fleet returned home,

the people punished its commanders, in the belief that they might have conquered Sicily, but had been bribed to go away (IV. 65). Warned by this example, Nikias, in 413, refused to withdraw from the island without orders: he knew, he said, the temper of the Athenians. For his own part, he would rather take his chance and fall, if he must, by the hand of the enemy than die unjustly on a dishonourable charge at theirs (VII. 48). Indeed, there are few points wherein Athenian reason and humanity appear to greater disadvantage: one thinks of Voltaire's gibe at the country where they hanged admirals *pour encourager les autres*.

The allegation of corruption was not confined to military and naval commanders. Every meeting of the Assembly opened with a solemn curse upon all who deceived the people for bribes. Yet orators could always prejudice the audience against their opponents by suggesting that the latter were bought (III. 38, 42). No citizen, whatever his character or station, was above suspicion. Pericles had first made a name for himself, when, as a young man, he called in question the accounts of Kimon. Later on, he in his turn was accused of peculation, and some ancient writers have stated that he brought about the Peloponnesian War in order to stop an inquiry into his accounts. Be this as it may, Thucydides' statement that Pericles owed his ascendancy to his probity as much as to his

abilities clearly implies that probity was rare in Athens¹; and the same inference may be drawn from the frequency with which the charge of corruption was preferred and the facility with which it was credited, however preposterous it might seem to those who knew the accused.

Another cause of the prostitution of justice was fear of the aristocrats who were supposed to be always plotting against the republic. It is curious to observe in what similar ways certain emotions manifest themselves, no matter what the age or country. The danger to religion and liberty, real or imaginary, obsessed the populace of Athens as it did that of seventeenth century England; and Thucydides, in relating how Alcibiades' enemies exploited this obsession at the time of the famous *Hermæ* scandal, depicts a state of mind vividly reminiscent of the Popish Plot. There never was any ground for the suspicion that the sacrilege covered a political design: most probably it was, like similar acts of impiety committed at previous times, a drunken frolic of irresponsible young bloods (VI. 28). But the Athenians thought differently. They imprisoned many men of high character as conspirators, and day by day their desire to have the mystery cleared up grew more

¹ It would be strange to find a historian describing any eminent statesman of Victorian England as "most unbribable" (II. 65). On the other hand, it is natural to find every historian of the French Revolution laying stress on Robespierre's incorruptibility.

furious, until one of the prisoners made a "confession"; whereupon a number of judicial murders ensued, and the excitement subsided (VI. 60).

The most amazing manifestation of the chronic disease, however, is to be found, not in such periodical paroxysms of popular frenzy, but in a regular practice which formed part of the constitutional law of Athens—the notorious ostracism, whereby persons considered dangerous to the state on account of their outstanding merits were banished by public vote for a term of years. We are told by the advocates of the Athenian Democracy that this strange institution was a necessary precaution. Certainly, every state has the right to protect itself by preventive, no less than by penal, measures. But whereas other states try to protect themselves against crime, the Athenian Democracy alone saw danger in merit.

Up to this point we have considered the Athenian community in itself; and we have seen how little the orator's picture of it accords with the historian's. We will now turn to another aspect of that picture. In his speech Pericles also claims for Athens the peculiar distinction of a Power which by its greatness "gives the subject no room for complaining that he is not ruled by men worthy of empire." (II. 41). It is precisely the sentiment which became him to utter. But nature has not arranged things that way: men do not like to be ruled by others,

be the rulers never so great. Did the subjects of Athens form an exception ?

To understand the imperial position of Athens, we must glance back over its origin as sketched by Thucydides (I. 89-118 ; II. 13). After the defeat and retreat of the Persians in 479 B.C. the Ægean Greeks placed themselves under the leadership of Athens, with the object of carrying on the war against Persia. Each state was assessed in a certain quota, and the island of Delos was fixed as the place where the common treasury should be kept and the allies' delegates meet to deliberate in common assemblies. This happy state of things, however, did not last very long. The stronger the Athenians grew, the more overbearing and exacting they became, until the independent allies were converted into subjects, and the voluntary contributions into compulsory tribute. Thus Athens only helped the Ægean Greeks to throw off one yoke to force upon them another. The upshot was such as might have been expected. Naxos revolted in 466, Thasos the next year, followed in due course by Euboea and Samos. Everywhere the bid for freedom ended in an aggravation of servitude ; the Athenians suppressed the rebellions and safeguarded themselves against their recurrence by razing the fortifications and annexing the fleets of the subdued states ; in some parts even ejecting the inhabitants and appropriating their lands. A miserable fate, for

which, the historian judicially points out, the folly of the victims was largely to blame : most of them, to avoid campaigning, had preferred to contribute money in lieu of ships ; which enabled Athens to increase her own navy at their expense and, when they revolted, to find them an easy prey.

Such were the relations between Athens and her subjects when Pericles spoke. The events which had preceded did not confirm his claim. Those which followed belied it utterly. Had the Greek states been internally united, there can be little doubt that they would all have hailed Sparta as their liberator. But, if the Lacedaemonians did not impose tribute upon those who acknowledged their hegemony, they promoted among them an aristocratic form of government (I, 19), and the masses would in many cases sooner be tributaries to Athens than be governed by their own aristocrats ; the rather because the financial burden, under a democratic regime, fell chiefly upon the rich. Even so, however, the love of freedom asserted itself, with terrible consequences.

The fourth year of the Peloponnesian War was signalised by the suppression of the Mytilenaeen revolt. In their wrath the Athenians determined to slaughter all the adult males and to sell the women and children as slaves ; but on reflection they modified the sentence. Only the ringleaders were executed, to the number of "more than a

thousand" (III. 36, 50). It has been suggested that here we have an exaggeration due to a copyist's error. I am quite willing to accept this view. It is, in my opinion, extremely probable: "the Greek numeral system lending itself so easily to enormous mistakes."¹ But no such mitigation is possible in the case of Skione, whose rising was punished with the massacre of all the adult males and the enslavement of the women and children (IV. 120-133; V. 32). Worse still was the lot of Thyrea, where the Æginetans had settled after their expulsion from their own island by the Athenians at the beginning of the War: the town was destroyed and all the surviving inhabitants were carried to Athens and butchered in cold blood (IV. 57).

¹ G. Murray, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature*, p. 194. I would add that behind the α (1,000) we may perhaps guess at an original φ (90). Errors equally gross probably account for more exaggerated statements than we are aware of—e.g. the colossal figures in Herodotus.

At this point Grote relates how the Athenians drove their admiral Paches, the conqueror of Mytilene, to suicide for dishonouring two Mytilenæan women—and Mahaffy censures Thucydides for passing over in silence so edifying an example of righteousness on the part of the democracy whose crimes he recounts. That people capable of condemning all the Mytilenæan women to slavery should have been so sensitive on the honour of two of them seems intrinsically improbable enough; and the only external evidence is an epigram in Agathias, a Byzantine author of the 6th century A.D. Plutarch mentions the suicide of Paches in open court twice, and each time among the examples of the unrighteous treatment meted out to distinguished citizens by the Demos. The story of the unfortunate ladies either he had never heard—which would not be surprising if, as seems most likely, it was invented after his time—or he did not believe, which also would not be surprising, seeing that in such matters Plutarch demanded corroborative evidence.—*Aristides*, XXVI., *Nikias*, VI.

The tale of horrors culminates in the Melian affair : from a historical point of view a very unimportant incident, yet extraordinarily instructive, because in the way in which Athens treated that unfortunate little island one sees the crowning act of barbarism committed by the democratic empire at the zenith of its glory.

Melos, although a colony of the Lacedaemonians, had taken no part in the War and given no provocation, when, in 416, the Athenians despatched a mission to bring it under their sway. All considerations of right were brushed aside as irrelevant : " You know, and we know," said they to the Melians, " that right is considered in men's discussions only when both parties are of equal strength : what he *can do* is the only standard of the stronger, and the weaker has to give way." The Melians did not deny this. " But," they pleaded, " must we be your enemies ? Will you not regard us as friends if we continue neutral and at peace with you ? " The Athenians remained inexorable. " Submit or perish," they said in effect ; " those are the alternatives ; there are no others," and having failed to obtain a voluntary submission, they forced the Melians to surrender at discretion. Whereupon all the men of military age were put to death, the women and children were made slaves, and the island became the property of Athenian colonists (V. 89-116). Many critical readers will not accept

the authenticity of the dialogue in which the Athenian envoys are represented as exercising their arts of moral suasion. What was said is—they can see it—of merely psychological significance. But this nowise affects what was done—that is a matter of fact.¹

Attempts have been made to palliate the Mytilene and Skione atrocities as among the barbarities which the offended majesty of empire thought itself entitled to practise in ancient times against dependencies revolted and reconquered, while the cold-blooded massacre of the Æginetan prisoners has been defended as in accordance with the barbarous laws of ancient warfare. Of course, we all know the heights of turpitude which nations, ancient and modern alike, can reach under the stimulus of war. But the Melos business admits of none of these

¹ Personally I see no reason for doubting that a conference of this kind did take place and that Thucydides may have got the outline of what passed in it, directly or indirectly, from both sides: his statement about the slaughter of all Melians of military age does not, of course, exclude the survival of elders—among them perhaps some of the persons who took part in the conference. In a measure also the debate has great internal probability: the main argument of the Athenians—the argument of the stronger—and the Melian answer, that they must resist for their honour's sake and trust to God, are such as we know to have been actually used on similar occasions in modern times. Grote very aptly cites a parallel from Thiers' *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*; more recent instances are furnished by the history of Greece during the Great War. But, while unable to dismiss this memorable conference as a mere fiction, I am unable to believe that the men engaged in it could have wasted so much time on a theoretical development of principles and their consequences. For these subtleties the responsibility, I make no doubt, lies with the author.

excuses. The greatest ingenuity could find no defence for it. The Melians were not rebel subjects but independent neutrals; there was no feud between them and the Athenians; and the latter, having attacked them in full peace, could not pretend that they were justified in treating them as prisoners of war, or that they acted under the war impulses of hate and fear. We have seen the enterprise described as defensible on military grounds: few acts of aggression could not be similarly defended—by the perpetrator. Nor is it easy to discover the military grounds. Experts tell us, doubtless truly, that the striking power of a naval state depends not merely on the number of its ships, but on the number of its bases. But Athens does not seem to have ever used Melos, or to have ever thought of using it, as a base. The whole proceeding was nothing but a piece of wanton violence arising from the pride of strength and rank lust of conquest. So much so that those who think that Thucydides, with an eye to dramatic effect, staged the outrage as a sort of climax of insolence coming immediately before the Sicilian downfall may not be far wrong. At any rate, the dialogue which ushers it in removes all doubt as to the author's view of such proceedings.¹

¹ It must not be supposed that he was exceptional in his view. The curious idea, expressed by many modern writers, that such deeds were less repugnant to the pagan than they are to the Christian conscience, apparently arises from the delusion that the "ancients" were men constituted differently from

ourselves. The exact opposite can easily be proved by a reference to Xenophon, who depicts to us the Athenians, in their collapse, recalling all the above crimes and anticipating with terror and remorse that they will be made to pay for them (*Hellen.* II. ii., 3, 10). Even killing the crew of a captured enemy warship is characterised as a transgression of the law (*παράνομειν*, *Ibid.*, II. i., 31-32; Cp. Plut. *Pericles*, XXIII). As to the first Mytilenaeon decree, the very bearers felt it to be, in Thucydides' words, " a monstrous business " (*πράγμα ἀλλόκοτον*, III. 49).

CHAPTER VIII

THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

(Continued)

Clearly, the working of the democracy had failed to satisfy Thucydides. But are we to conclude from this that he leaned to an oligarchy? By birth he belonged to the nobility, in temperament he was an aristocrat, and at times he shows much sympathy with the aristocratic party. Yet we find Athenagoras, the Syracusan demagogue, saying: "An oligarchy, while giving the people a share of the risks, takes all the profits" (VI. 39), and Phrynichus, the Athenian general, "The so-called 'fair and good' were the persons who prompted the people to evil acts from which they themselves benefited most." (VIII. 48). One cannot take these for the historian's actual sentiments, but the fact that he is careful to report them has its significance. Still more significant is his grim account of the oligarchical revolution at Athens (VIII. 65 foll.) and of that at Megara—"the longest-lived change of government effected by so small a faction" (IV. 74). These words plainly represent the historian himself, who in one of his rare direct pronouncements elaborates the thought fully: "an oligarchy soon perishes,

for each of its promoters has the pretension to be supreme ; whereas in a democracy, when an election is made, a man submits to the result more easily, because he does not feel he has been worsted by his peers'' (VIII. 89). It is, I think, evident that they who called Thucydides an oligarch began too soon their nomenclature. Further evidence, if needed, may be found in the sobriety of the Acanthian and the moderation of the Samian democrats (IV. 88 ; VIII. 73), as well as in the rendering—so foreign in its perfect balance to any political prepossession—of the crimes which marked the conduct of both parties at Corcyra (III. 70 foll.). Thucydides holds a brief for neither system, but frankly exposes the fundamental defects of both : an oligarchy lacks stability, a democracy efficiency. We are left to draw from these premisses our own conclusions ; which we can only do after clearing our minds of the misleading associations which the latter term owes to modern usage.

That of the two systems democracy was best suited to the Hellenic temperament cannot be disputed. Of all Greek traits the most conspicuous through the ages is love of equality, or, more accurately, hate of superiority. One sees even in Homer, where the divine right of kings still lingers, how the chiefs spoke to their overlord, the soldiers to their chiefs, and the slaves to their masters. Oligarchy could not last just because it conflicted

with this spirit. On the other hand, democracy conformed to the nature of most Greeks and allowed free play to their individualism. But was it the form of government best fitted to fulfil the purposes for which governments exist ?

If the object of government is the safety and prosperity of a state, it would be difficult to imagine any form of government less calculated to accomplish it than government by perpetual plebiscite. Every business requires special knowledge and, besides knowledge, prudence, which postulates calm deliberation. The mass of men cannot have the knowledge or the opportunities for calm deliberation required by such an intricate business as the management of a state : and for this reason our modern democracies, though resting in the last resort on the will of the people, limit the practical expression of that will to the periodical election of a few hundred representatives who deal with problems of administration and policy ; while the executive power is delegated to an even smaller body of professional statesmen. Thus modern democracy works out in practice as merely the right to choose an oligarchy.¹

¹ The nearest approach to the modern, and especially to the British, idea of a democracy is to be found in the Spartan Constitution with its limited monarchy, its senate, its popular assembly, and its strong executive of five ministers (Ephors). But even that was more democratic than any modern constitution inasmuch as the ministers were elected annually by the popular assembly, and great questions such as war or peace were decided by this assembly, to which all citizens belonged.

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Athenian democracy meant something quite different. It meant a system of government under which the sovereign power was not only vested in the people, but was exercised directly by the people. All matters, great and small, relating to foreign as well as home affairs were brought before the General Assembly (*Ecclesia*)—a mass meeting, no more and no less—by a Council of five hundred (*Boulé*) annually chosen by lot, whose function was to prepare subjects of debate for that assembly. In other words, the Council of five hundred corresponded roughly to a modern Cabinet, and the mass meeting of the whole adult male population to a modern Parliament. The very administration of justice was entrusted to vast bodies of amateur judges chosen by lot. Everything ran counter to the ordinary experience that numerous assemblies of men—even of educated men—will commit acts from which the individuals composing them would recoil ; for every numerous assembly is a mob, let the individuals who compose it be what they may. It all rested on the fallacy that “the many are the best judges of a matter,” and on the fact that “a few are more open to corruption.” As a logical consequence, matters the essence of which is secrecy—and which are by modern democracies left to a few statesmen meeting in private—were given at Athens the widest publicity : ambassadors coming on missions of alliance or of peace had to

treat with the General Assembly, and even military despatches of the gravest import were read out to the whole city (I. 31-44 ; IV. 22 ; V. 45 ; VII. 10). Pericles had boasted that the Athenians scorned to hide anything by which their enemies might gain an advantage (II. 39). The truth was that they would not submit to such a limitation of popular authority as is involved in official secrecy. Consider, too, those oscillations of policy which resulted from the mutability of the popular mind (II. 59, 61 ; III. 37). The difficulty of keeping people in the same mind has proved troublesome wherever the supremacy of the popular voice has been recognised. It was more than troublesome in a state where the popular voice dictated every move from day to day. Small wonder that the very leaders of the demos felt at times constrained to proclaim their want of faith in democracy as an instrument of government.

Although primarily a product of the Greek temperament, this system owed its rapid growth in Athens to special circumstances. Maritime expansion had brought about the multiplication of seamen and the formation of a large mercantile class : this in its turn led to a series of social convulsions and " reforms," each of which had added to the power of the masses. And it had received its final development at the hands of Pericles, who had increased the power of the people in order to make it the basis

of his own. He had taken from the Council of the Areopagus—a body consisting of men of advanced years and exalted station appointed for life—most of its privileges, thus destroying the counterpoise provided to check the excess of popular power ; and bade for popularity against Kimon by various methods. Thanks to his princely wealth, this statesman was able to display a liberality which endeared him to its recipients. Pericles, whose private means did not admit of such displays, made the public treasury the fund of his bounties. He introduced doles for the poor and pay for the jurors, enlarged the navy, which meant the maintenance of more seamen, and spent much of the treasure contributed by the allies for quite other ends on magnificent public buildings which at once beautified Athens and provided employment for the working classes. The cult of the many could hardly be pushed farther.¹ The upshot was an extreme democracy, which could only work for the safety and prosperity of the state on condition that it were kept under despotic control.

This paradoxical condition Thucydides found

¹ Aristotle calculates that over 20,000 men in Athens—that is, nearly every citizen—subsisted on the public funds. (*Αθην. Πολιτ.* XXIV). As the cost of this universal public service—civil, military and naval—was largely defrayed by the subject states, whose tribute formed at least 60 per cent. of the Athenian revenue, we are not surprised to learn from Thucydides that the mass of the people looked forward to the conquest of Sicily with intense longing as an additional source of "everlasting pay" (*ἀίδιον μισθοφοράν*, VI. 24).

realised in the period preceding and during the first two and a half years of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens, "though nominally a democracy, was really governed by the first man" (II. 65) —a personal government depending on the exceptional prestige of the governor. Pericles was able to control the masses through their confidence in him. By sheer force of character he attained to such an ascendancy that he ruled those tumultuous assemblies with a tight rein. He never flattered them in their follies nor complied with their caprices against their true interests and his own judgment, but used the resources of his eloquence to keep them within the bounds of moderation, raising their spirits when they were unreasonably depressed and sobering them when they grew too presumptuous. While he lived he exercised, with only a transient interruption towards the end of his career, the authority of a despot ; and all went well.

But such a paradoxical condition can, in the nature of things, be realised only rarely. What is bound to happen normally, happened in Athens after the death of Pericles. The politicians who competed with each other for the leadership, unable to impose their will upon the people, "were ready to sacrifice the whole conduct of affairs to the whims of the people" (II. 65). They could not play the part of despots ; they therefore played the

part of sycophants. By pandering to the passions of the mob, they got it under their sway and were thus able to exercise a pernicious influence on national policy. It is the only way by which mediocrity can succeed, whether in an imperial court or in a popular assembly. The mob is as impatient of serious counsel and as insatiable of flattery as any Sultan. It will accept for a fact everything that fits in with its prejudices and will listen only to such arguments as support what it is already inclined to do. The would-be favourite adapts himself to this disposition. Thus demagogy takes the place of statesmanship, and states drift to destruction.

An oligarchical regime, then, being ephemeral, and a Periclean regime an abnormal accident, what was the form of government which Thucydides would have liked to see established in Athens as a permanent system? The question has puzzled many of his readers rather unduly; for Thucydides himself gives the answer. It is true that he does not labour the point: having indicated the system which to his own mind combined the greatest amount of good with the least of evil, he makes no effort to persuade others: the indication is none the less plain. After relating how, in 411 B.C., the management of affairs passed from the oligarchy of Four Hundred, which had for a while usurped power, to a body of five thousand with certain property

qualifications, he pronounces the constitution thus evolved—a limited democracy—the best government enjoyed by the Athenians in his time; “for it was a blend equally fair to the few and to the many” (VIII. 97).¹ He obviously saw in it a triumph of the principle which runs through the best Greek thought from Æschylus to Aristotle—the principle of the golden mean. Either of the two elements of power in excess was hurtful: salvation lay in an equitable mixture.²

And, in fact, as long as this moderation lasted Athens raised her head again. But it did not last long. It was only a fit of temporary sanity induced by fright. The victory at Arginusæ in 406 B.C. marked its end. The victorious generals were condemned to death for having failed, owing

¹ The suspicion of spuriousness cast upon this passage by some critics seems to me entirely gratuitous.

² Thucydides' position may also be gathered from his sympathetic reference to “the moderate part of the citizens” (τὰ μέσα τῶν πολιτῶν) who, in the fierce struggle between the democratic and the oligarchic factions, were ruined by both, because they would not join either (III. 82). Here (Cp. VIII. 75) he uses the term μέσον in the sense in which it is used by Æschylus (*Eum.* 527), and as it is defined by Aristotle, “what is equally distant from either of the extremes” (τὸ ἴσον ἀπέχον ἀφ' ἐκατέρου τῶν ἄκρων—*Ethic. Nic.* II. vi. 5)—the middle course. But elsewhere by μέσος πολίτης (VI. 54) he means, as does Aristotle (*Polit.* IV. 11 and 12), “a citizen of the middle class.” The double use of the word is not accidental. Thucydides observes that extreme poverty and extreme opulence both incite men to mischief (III. 45). Aristotle makes a similar reflection (*Rhet.* I. 12), and Euripides clinches the matter by adding that, of the three ranks, the middle one is the one which saves a community (*Suppl.* 238 foll.). Thus, in Greek experience, the middle course coincided with the middle class—moderate politics went with moderate possessions. The observation is confirmed by universal experience.

to a violent storm, to rescue those who had been shipwrecked in the fight ; and a Lacedaemonian offer of peace, on the terms that each side should retain what they held, was rejected at the instigation of a drunken demagogue. Shortly afterwards came the defeat at Aegospotami, where Athens lost both her fleet and her empire.¹ From these events, which Thucydides did not live to describe, we are amply authorised to affirm, with him, that the Athenians were overthrown not by their enemies, but by themselves.

The mistake of pushing a war too far has often been committed in modern times, and has afforded historians matter for reflection on the folly which prevents nations from making proper use of victories. But never has this mistake proved so fatal as at Athens ; nowhere have national interests been treated with the fury which shuts its eyes to consequences completely ; for nowhere did the constitution place the state at the mercy of orators whose presumptuous ignorance and insolent passion could only advise desperate extremities—arbiters, for such they were at the time, of the destinies of the most civilised portion of mankind.

¹ Xen. *Hellen.* I. vi.–vii. ; Arist. *'Αθην. Πολιτ.* XXXIV. The discovery of this treatise has set at rest, I imagine, all uncertainty as to the time of the peace offer. Diodorus (XIII. 52–53), who, writing 300 years after Aristotle, places it in 410 B.C., was most probably guilty of a slip not peculiar to ancient writers. To adopt, as some historians have done, both statements seems an excess of caution : a comparison of the two accounts leaves little doubt that they both refer to the same occurrence.

We can now better understand why the contemplation of Cleon seems to rouse in the historian a feeling as near akin to bitterness as he is capable of. He saw in that first of the demagogues the personification of the sinister forces to which his country had become a prey and which ultimately led it to ruin. His reference to Hyperbolus, who for a short time succeeded Cleon in the leadership of the masses (VIII. 73), betrays the same feeling. When we take stock of what has been in comparison with what might have been, we cannot help, even after the lapse of centuries, a feeling of bitterness towards those demented directors of public opinion. Yet these are the only instances in which Thucydides departs from the strict reserve that he manifests throughout his work: and even here an ancient critic is much struck with his restraint.¹

The magnitude of that restraint may be measured by a glance at other contemporary accounts published before the Athenian democracy had yielded all its fruits. Such is the curious pamphlet on the Constitution of Athens once ascribed to

¹ ὁ Θουκυδίδης οὐδὲ τῶν Κλέωνος ἀμαρτημάτων ἀφθόνων ὄντων ἐποίησατο σαφὴ τὴν διήγησιν· Ὑπερβόλου τε τοῦ δημαγωγοῦ θιγῶν ἐνὶ ῥήματι καὶ μοχθηρὸν ἄνθρωπον προσειπὼν ἀφῆκε.—“Plut.” *De Herod. Malign.* I. 3. It is instructive to find two contemporaries who differed about everything else agreeing in their description of Hyperbolus and his like (πονηρὸν προστάτην—Arist. *Peace*, 684; πονηρῶν προστατῶν—Eur. *Suppliants*, 243). Yet modern critics will have it that the historian’s language in speaking of these worthies is strong *prima facie* evidence against his fairness to them.

Xenophon—a criticism which often assumes a tone of mordant irony that has been misunderstood for praise. The writer begins by saying that he cannot approve of a polity which aims at exalting the “base” and oppressing the “good.” But, the villainous object once granted, he undertakes to show that all its institutions are admirably devised to accomplish it. There follows a picture of incompetence and corruption fatal to good administration, but indispensable to the maintenance of the rule of the rabble, whose sole concern is to make the rich, both at home and in the subject states, grind to its own mill. After this essay in well-considered vilification, it seems hardly worth while to cite the series of satires in which Aristophanes vented his burning scorn for the Democratic Empire—master-pieces of sustained invective, yet perhaps less notable for their vigour than for their venom.

Of such virulence we have no trace in Thucydides. Nevertheless, the facts tell their own melancholy tale. Probably the whole history of mankind contains no record of a more hopelessly crude, inept, and altogether contemptible polity. Long experience of self-government had not produced among the Athenians that standard of political wisdom which fits men to deal efficiently with the difficult problems of peace and war; and the acquisition of foreign dependencies had brought them face to

face with a problem for which they were not equipped by previous experience.

It has been said that, had Athens by judicious use of her power welded these dependencies into a homogeneous whole, she would stand justified for her usurpation: Greece needed closer union. Whether an extreme democracy could ever have succeeded in such a task may well be doubted. But in any case Athens never attempted to create the least community of interest or sentiment between herself and her dependencies. Her conception of empire began and ended in exploitation. The subjects were regarded as existing for the dominant city, not the dominant city for the subjects. In peace she taxed them to keep the machinery for their exploitation. In war she increased their taxes to forward her own cause. Thucydides does not enlarge either on the harshness or on the rapacity of Athenian rule: he even omits to mention the doubling of the tribute; and in describing the revolt of Acanthus (IV. 84-88) he shows us a subject state that did not leap to meet the chance of liberation—a circumstance from which apologists of Athens have drawn arguments for their thesis that the hate inspired by her rule has been exaggerated and that the empire was not quite the scheme of plunder and oppression which her detractors make out. Undoubtedly, among the hundreds of subject cities there were differences of treatment and

feeling (VI. 85)¹; and it is likely enough that what galled most of them was less the hardship than the humiliation of their lot.

For the rest, Thucydides makes it plain that there was nothing but physical force to bind the bulk of the dependencies to their mistress—not even the presence of a common enemy. The Persians had long ceased to be a menace, save to the Greek cities in Asia, which would therefore, generally speaking, cherish the Athenian connection as the lesser evil. With this exception, Athens made the subject states no return whatever for all she got from them. Her imperial mission was to impose burdens without assuming any responsibilities. She did not even pretend that in pursuing her own interest she performed a duty.

The one thing that redeems Athenian imperialism is its candour. Among the multitude of speeches there is never any appeal to lofty principles—no cant, no hypocrisy. The Athenians do not try to disguise their rapacity under a humanitarian mask. Their position is clear: expressed in unguarded terms. Their will to rule, they frankly

¹ The principle of expediency which guided differences of treatment, as set forth in this passage, may be further illustrated from inscriptions relating to tribute. Some cities in Persia and Macedonia, it would appear, paid little or nothing: their situation enabled them, if they were taxed or taxed heavily, to change their allegiance. On the other hand, the islands, being more completely under the control of Athens, had to pay what she willed.—See Jowett's Essay on Inscriptions, *Thucydides*, vol. II., pp. xxix. foll.

declare, springs from love of glory (τιμῇ), and love of profit (ὠφελεία). Their claim to rule is based on might ; and in support of this claim they appeal to a law of nature universal, eternal and inevitable : " the weaker must be kept under by the stronger " (I. 75-76 ; V. 105).¹ Then follows the fixed determination to hold by force what they had grasped by fraud ; to this they are compelled by a motive even more powerful than the first two—fear (δέος) ; for tyrants must expect the hatred of those whom they oppress. Empire or downfall is the watchword, iterated by every Athenian speaker, now calmly, as in the speech of Pericles : " You are bound to maintain your position : there is the danger to which the hatred of your imperial rule has exposed you. By this time your empire has become a tyranny, which may have been unjustly acquired, but which cannot be safely relinquished " (II. 63) ; now clamorously, as in the speech of Cleon : " You should remember that your empire is a despotism exercised over unwilling subjects, who are always conspiring against you. They have no love for you, but they are held down by force. Right or wrong, you are resolved to rule " (III. 37, 40).

These utterances, to say nothing of the acts

¹ Sometimes, indeed, they base their claim on the part which they had played years ago in the Persian War (I. 74 ; VI. 83). But they themselves admit that this argument is not convincing. (V. 89).

accompanying them, reveal sufficiently the spirit in which Athens faced the problem—that brutal egoism which alienated her allies, exposed her to the full force of her rivals' antagonism, and brought recruits to the group that was opposing her claim to hegemony.

Many who gaze at the Parthenon, while acknowledging that it was built by a fraudulent appropriation of other people's money, would fain find for that claim some justification in Athenian Culture, and quote the Funeral Oration in proof that such was Pericles' own idea. In truth, as has been seen, Pericles does speak incidentally of Athens as a mistress of whom her subjects ought to be proud ; but those subjects did not take that view of the matter : the only prestige Athens enjoyed among them was a prestige of terror. As for the other Greek states, if they noticed that idea at all, they most probably read in it what the European nations read in Germany's gospel of Kultur : Athens was to be first in strength, first in wealth, and so fortified and assured in her greatness, she was to impose her thought, her ethics, her manners—in one word, her civilisation—on admiring and submissive mankind. Nay, considering how much Athens lived on tribute, the pretension really meant that the other Greeks should drudge in order that the Athenians might cultivate the beautiful at their ease.

Whether Pericles put forward such a preposterous

claim seriously, I doubt. If I dared I would even say that the stately panegyric in which he labours to exalt the glory of Athens was—much of it—just what he said it was not: “mere vaunting language for the occasion” (II. 41).¹ At any rate, what seems more pertinent to note here, Thucydides is free from all delusions of this kind. Nowhere in his work have we any attempt to justify Athens’ claim to mastery even by implication. Instead, we have a multitude of facts which combine to present it as an outrage. If, however, Pericles’ idea was the uplifting of his own countrymen so as to make Athens a pattern of the highest life to which liberty combined with law could attain—a fountain of those influences which soften and ennoble our natures—Thucydides could not but applaud the aim, and deplore its failure.

Briefly, in Thucydides’ pages the Athenian democracy appears before us as a prototype of the Italian republics which were similarly convulsed by factions, and, while claiming liberty for them-

¹ There is no evidence that the character ascribed to the Athenian democracy was, even at the time when Pericles spoke, more than an ideal. The question arises: Did Pericles, in speaking of this ideal as a reality, deceive himself, or did he only give a sample of those “spells” which, as Socrates had heard, “he used to chant to the city and make it love him” (*ἐπωδὸς* . . . ὡς ἐπῶδων τῇ πόλει ἐποίει αὐτὴν φιλεῖν αὐτόν.—Xen. *Mem.* II. vi. 13)? For my own part, I think the latter alternative by far the more probable. The panegyric was pronounced in circumstances calculated to disillusion the most hardened idealist—in the very middle of that storm of popular fury which struck Phidias, Anaxagoras, Aspasia, and Pericles himself.

selves, treated their subject cities with the brutality of tyrants. In both cases the lowest political morality synchronised with the highest literary and artistic achievement, as if to show that the development of character is not necessarily included in the term culture.

The unpleasantness of the presentment has moved admirers of Athens to impugn its accuracy. The ancient rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus is sorely offended at the sentiments attributed to the Athenians in their conference with the Melians. He cannot believe that "the men who had humanised life" (οἱ τὸν κοινὸν βίον ἐξημερώσαντες) could have thought and spoken so. His unbelief comes partly from a preconceived idea and partly, no doubt, from that *naïveté* which is the result of simple inexperience. Some modern critics are even more sweeping : " We do not see the real Athens of Pericles in the pages of Thucydides," they insist. " We know what Thucydides thought ; but we have not the facts complete before us. We have only his opinion about the facts." It is a remarkable proof of the power of illusion in human affairs that the glamour of culture should have prevailed against the testimony of its own creators. For, if it be true that Athens could nurse men of genius, it is not less true that her politics were too much for them. Thucydides' " opinion " was shared by all the Athenian writers of the time who touched upon the

subject, and also by Aristotle—a man remote in every sense from the atmosphere in which they lived. The very argument used to discredit the opinion of some of these writers—that they wrote after the failure of the Democratic Empire—is a very strong one in its favour. Plato and Xenophon judged the Athenian system by its fruits ; which confirmed the judgment passed upon it beforehand by Aristophanes and Pseudo-Xenophon. In fact, seldom have we in human affairs a finding which satisfies so fully the conditions required by science : a proposition—“mob government is madness”—brought to the test of experience.

They who like to think of Athens better than she looks as seen through the eyes of Thucydides will doubtless continue to believe that the historian, prejudiced by the injustice of his own treatment, or by his aristocratic temperament, has done less than justice to the spirit which animated the Athenian Democracy. There is not one human record in which a critic cannot find flaws of prejudice, though, perhaps, the more prejudiced the critic, the more flaws he will find. In such things opinions depend less on evidence than on the mental habits of the persons who hold them, and a change of opinion does not imply an increase of the data upon which it rests, but a change in the habits of thought which it reflects. The glamour of culture apart, enthusiasm for the Athenian polity, in defiance of all con-

temporary witnesses, has grown with the democratic tide and will only cease when students come to recognise that they are the victims of a verbal hallucination—that the ancient *demokratia* is the very last regime a modern democrat would wish for his own country. It was a childish experiment. It never succeeded and never could succeed. Its sole value for posterity is that of a warning. When this is realised, students will read Thucydides as such a writer deserves to be read : not to contradict and confute, but to weigh and consider.

And now I come to my conclusion. That Thucydides possessed the most precious attribute of a historian to a superb degree has been acknowledged through the ages ; and the assaults made upon it from time to time, by provoking a fresh examination, have tended to strengthen rather than shake our confidence in his impartiality. Far be it from us, however, to permit this, even by our silence, to acquire the semblance of an absolute dogma. That would be an excess which Thucydides himself would be the first to deprecate. Impartiality is comparative, and we must compare Thucydides not with an ideal historian such as has never existed and is not likely ever to exist, but with the historians we know : historians like Macaulay, whose *History of England* was a gigantic Whig pamphlet written in reply to Hume's *History*, which was to some extent a Tory pamphlet ; historians like Mitford

and Grote, one of whom was habitually inebriated by zeal for aristocracy, and the other, in treating of democracy, not infrequently forgot his sobriety. The distinction of Thucydides is that he comes out of such a comparison *facile princeps*.

CHAPTER IX

DETACHMENT

Among the features of Thucydides' work which throw a strong light on the character of the man as well as of the writer there is one particularly notable in these times when historians make it their avowed aim to produce narratives which, though adhering strictly to historical truth, shall be written from a national point of view. The possibility of an alliance between history and special pleading does not appear to have occurred to Thucydides, whose courage in recording the vices of his own country is equalled by his generosity in recognising the virtues of his country's enemies. Those enemies, one gathers, deserve a higher place in the world's opinion than has been assigned to them by persons temperamentally disposed to value the splendid rather than the useful.

The Spartans created no art ; they achieved no triumphs in literature ; they contributed nothing to the beauty or amenity of life. But they had the sagacity to invent a constitution which held their state together for centuries and moulded a society that offered a refreshing contrast to the

Athenian.¹ Everything in Sparta breathed the spirit of order and loyalty : a commonwealth of law-abiding, unassuming citizens, who, free from all self-assertion, made discipline their virtue and obedience their pride. The taunt of quietism addressed to them by the Corinthians was really the highest tribute : the bravest and best organised soldiers in Greece, they did not abuse their advantage for imperialist aggrandisement, but were content to ensure their own unfettered existence within their national boundaries. Never subject to tyranny themselves, they only interfered in the affairs of the other Greeks by assisting them to liberty ; and having accomplished this task, they retired within their own dominions, minded their own business, and left the other Greeks to manage theirs. The same in the war against Persia : as long as the other Greeks wanted Sparta to lead, she led ; the moment they demurred, she withdrew and left to Athens the glory of hegemony (I. 18, 69, 95). The Peloponnesian, unlike the Athenian Confederacy, remained an alliance among free states bound together simply by the ties of a common interest. Not until the Sicilian expedition demonstrated the

¹ See the speech of the Corinthians (I. 70), and those of Archidamus (I. 84, 3), and Cleon (III. 37, 3-5). It can hardly be doubted that the last two passages express Thucydides' own estimate of the relative merits of "dulness" and "cleverness." At any rate, they emphasise the eternal truth that it is in the sobriety and self-control of the people, not in its ornamental talents, that the strength and permanence of a state reside.

full extent of the danger to which she was exposed, and the magnitude of the Athenian disaster encouraged the hope of a speedy success, does Sparta come forward as an aspirant to supremacy over the whole of Greece (VIII. 2)—a position in which she imitated Athens so well that the Greek cities had no cause to bless their liberator. But this lay still in the future.

The chief stain on Sparta's record hitherto was the unscrupulous treatment of her Helots. An army of occupation in a conquered country, the Lacedaemonians found themselves under the perpetual necessity of repressing a population which they could neither assimilate nor conciliate. Most of their institutions were specially framed to meet the constant menace of revolt (IV. 80); and to this menace, not to any inherent exemption from original sin, we may, without incurring the charge of needless cynicism, trace the root of Spartan virtue: the Lacedaemonians could not afford to be lax at home or aggressive abroad. In like manner, their crusade against "tyrants" was not prompted by philanthropic motives. Sparta most probably disliked a "tyrannical" government among her neighbours for the same reason for which France and Germany dislike imperial regimes in each other: it is more convenient to have one's neighbours in a state of internal division and the weakness which must result. But this explanation does not alter the fact

that, until she yielded to temptation, Lacedaemon, devoid of imperialist, as she was of industrial, ambitions, coveted neither the territory nor the trade of her neighbours, and, labouring under no social unrest, she had no inducement to seek diversion from domestic grievances in foreign brigandage. A singular example of political temperance united with military power, whose memory Thucydides has placed upon a rock.

The doing justice to an enemy was no new thing in Greek literature. The noblest characters in the *Iliad* are the Trojan couple Hector and Andromache ; and the epic contains no more appealing figure than Priam, the aged King of Troy. Herodotus shows equal magnanimity in dealing with Xerxes, and Herodotus, we must remember, wrote to please : we may therefore presume that this sort of thing pleased his readers—a very remarkable circumstance when we consider that the devastation of Greece by the Persians was still fresh in their minds. Evidently, the Greeks could appreciate impartial treatment of history as well as of poetry.¹

But, whereas neither Homer was ever denounced as a pro-Trojan, nor Herodotus as a pro-Persian, Thucydides has not escaped the charge of pro-

¹ The same trait we find in art. There is in the Constantinople Museum a beautiful sarcophagus, supposed to be that of Alexander the Great. Its sides are decorated with bas-reliefs representing a battle between Greeks and Persians : there are as many Greeks down as Persians—the sculptor has dealt out prowess with an even hand.

Lacedaemonianism. The explanation may be found in the fact that Thucydides did not only give a favourable account of Sparta, but also an unfavourable account of Athens ; and Athens, after ceasing to be a political, became a spiritual power of immense magnitude : a place of pilgrimage and an object of veneration for men of letters, whose delight was to dwell upon the marvels of her culture with a piety which deepened as its object receded in time, until to their adoring imagination the Athenians appeared in a transcendental condition of beatitude rather than in the modest and chequered colours of real life. For the grammarian and rhetorician in Roman and Byzantine days the age of Pericles was a heroic age, peopled by demi-gods—thousands and thousands of them, all endowed with gifts of wisdom and virtue such as were never perhaps given on this plain, prosaic earth except to one or two individuals in a century. Generation after generation, they pored over the old writers, spending weary nights and days in the elucidation of abstruse problems of syntax, in the tabulation of metrical anomalies, in the classification of rhetorical tropes—always with a keener relish for words than for facts. It was by such critics that Thucydides was accused of writing in a spirit of malice against the city which had driven him into exile. This view, enunciated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, is elaborated by the anonymous

Greek biographer who points, in proof, to the various speeches in which the Corinthians, the Lacedaemonians, and the Mytilenaeans say what they think of Athenian "tyranny and covetousness," as well as to the historian's supposed deliberate and consistent tendency to magnify the victories of Sparta and the reverses of Athens—out of sheer spite.¹

A dark indictment this, which would make Thucydides unworthy of the name of historian, if true: but is it true? Not one atom of evidence is adduced. It all rests upon a bare supposition, which may satisfy those who dislike unpatriotic candour or those who are unable to understand the pursuit of truth from pure love of it, but which is not corroborated by the most minute examination of Thucydides' work. So far as the speeches are concerned, one does not need to be a very profound critic to see quite plainly that they are, in the main, *ex parte* statements, and whatever the Corinthians, the Lacedaemonians and the Mytilenaeans say against Athens is amply balanced by what Athenian speakers say against them. Besides, if oratorical efforts are to be taken as expressing always the historian's own views of the contending parties, Pericles' panegyric of Athens would suffice to convict him of excessive philathenianism. It is in his

¹ *Thucydides Vita*, p. 13. Cp. Dion. Hal., *Ad Cn. Pomp.* 3; *De Thuc. Hist. Jud.* 41.

direct statements that we must seek the author's attitude, and there we find no tendency to partisanship.

More than once Thucydides extols the amazing vitality and tenacity of Athens who, even when herself besieged, persevered in the siege of Syracuse, and carried on two wars at once (VII. 28) ; who, even after the Sicilian catastrophe and while distracted by revolution at home, still held out for years, not only against her old enemies, but against the Sicilians who had combined with them, and against her own revolted subjects (II. 65). Indeed, his pointed references to the spirit and energy of the Athenian Demos have drawn the remark that there is in extreme popular government compensation for the evils it breeds. On the other hand, he does not spare the Lacedaemonians. In one place he tells us how, at the beginning of the War, they slaughtered indiscriminately all whom they caught trading with Athens, whether belligerents or neutrals, including even those very Athenian subjects for whose liberation they professed to be fighting (II. 67 ; III. 32). In another place he tells us how they ruined their own colony Heraclea by their harsh and oppressive rule (III. 93). Elsewhere we have them treating the garrison of Plataea with a severity as revolting as that displayed by the Athenians in other cases (III. 68). Once Thucydides even goes out of his way to illustrate their monstrous cruelty

and perfidy towards the Helots (IV. 80). Again and again he exposes that curious lack of enterprise which saved Athens several times and proved the Lacedaemonians "the most convenient enemies whom the Athenians could possibly have had" (II. 94; VIII. 96). As to responsibility for the War, at the outset, he finds, it had been on the Lacedaemonian side, but on the resumption of hostilities the verdict is against the Athenians, who by a flagrant violation of the treaty fully justified reprisals (VI. 105; VII. 18), though, he tells us, the "peace" was merely nominal: both sides marking time and getting what advantages they could: so that, in this respect, there is nothing to choose between them (V. 25-26). For the undue prolongation of hostilities, too, both sides were responsible at various stages; each in turn having rejected offers of peace in the hope of crushing the other (II. 59; IV. 21; V. 14).

It would be needless to multiply instances. The mere fact that readers of the History have always been divided—according to their national, political, intellectual or moral predispositions—between partisans of Athens and Sparta (the former predominating) proves how evenly the historian holds the scales: so that if, in the period treated by Thucydides, the Lacedaemonians, on the whole, show up better than the Athenians, the conclusion is forced upon us that they were better. Likewise in

his account of the Sicilian expedition the historian, while making it quite clear that the attack was due entirely to greed of conquest on the part of Athens, makes no effort to arouse the reader's sympathy with Syracuse. One side fought for dominion, the other for independence: but the victims, when they won, dealt with their would-be conquerors precisely as the latter meant to deal with them (VI. 1, 24; VII. 64, 68, 75, 87).

There is neither national nor anti-national point of view in Thucydides, but only the point of view of a detached observer. No doubt this was, partly, due to the accident of his exile, which placed him somewhat outside the conflict; partly, perhaps, to his foreign extraction. But it was chiefly the result of his mental constitution. For this same detachment characterises the whole of his work and is specially marked in his dealing with deeds in which humanity appears under its least lovable form. In his treatment of such deeds Thucydides contrasts sharply with many historians whom a laudable desire to be edifying lures on the slightest provocation into dismal moralising. Once or twice he accompanies the enormity with some explanation: the Peloponnesian envoys are put to death in retaliation (II. 67); the Plataeans are exterminated for reasons of policy (III. 68). But for the most part he is content to let the facts speak for themselves, without one word of comment; and when he does

stop by the way to reflect, his reflections usually are short, apt, and produce others in his readers. But nowhere does he come forward with reproof ; nowhere does he use the events he relates to enforce a lesson. He deems " such was the end of Pausanias the Lacedaemonian and Themistocles the Athenian, the two most illustrious Greeks of their day " (I. 138), a sufficient epilogue to his moving account of their nefarious careers ; and even the lengthy passages (II. 53 ; III. 82-83) in which he catalogues minutely the various forms of lawlessness let loose in Athens by the Plague and upon Greece by civil strife are each in the nature of a philosophical analysis, not of a moral homily.

I am aware that many a modern reader feels surprised at this reticence ; while the devout feel defrauded of that half-pleasurable sensation which virtuous souls seem to derive from the castigation of vice. Why does Thucydides refrain ? Perhaps he thought preaching as provincial as scoffing and gossiping. Perhaps he thought it superfluous ; if men could learn from history, there was his book, which throws so much light on one of the darkest pages of the human past, to help them. But most probably he knew that the light given by the past is a lantern at the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us. Certainly he did know that at bottom " one man does not differ much from another " (I. 84), that " most men's characters are

what their circumstances make them," and that—a reflection abundantly verified by subsequent history—similar deeds "will, under similar circumstances, always occur while the nature of mankind continues the same" (III. 82).

It is not a very hopeful outlook. Were Thucydides writing in these days, he would, without a doubt, be described as a cynical pessimist. But it is the outlook of one who, discarding all assumptions and taking men as they appear in experience, from an accurate observation of particular cases, arrived at a general view of the species, in health and in disease. This view may be summed up as follows: Generally self-interest is the mainspring of human conduct, and goodness a matter of condition. The average man, when well off, is comparatively good; but his virtue will not bear the stress of adversity. The fear of God ceases to restrain him as soon as he finds out—and this is easily done—that God treats the good and the bad alike. Stronger than the religious conscience—though operative only in a few cases—is the sense of honour (literally of disgrace, *αἰσχύνη*): the sense which not only makes some men ashamed to do what is base, but even impels them to self-sacrifice (II. 51, 53; III. 82). Such, stated in bare terms, is the result of Thucydides' induction. The experience of over two thousand years has not disproved its justness.

A similar detachment Thucydides manifests in his attitude towards a far greater sordidness than any individual crime ; and here he contrasts very significantly with his contemporary Euripides, whose mind is as modern as his own, but of a different cast. The poet is haunted by the glaring discrepancy between the code which governs the conduct of a good citizen, and the code which not only permits a statesman to commit every villainy for the benefit of his country, but actually forbids him ever to let his personal sense of justice or honour override his sense of national interest. That the interest of the state should be to the ruler the only inviolable law was a discovery which, once made, never ceased to distress Euripides. Thucydides sees quite as clearly the gulf between the two standards of virtue. His Pericles, personally, is as unlike Cleon as two men can well be, yet he scouts with no less scorn the idea of allowing moral scruples to outweigh imperial considerations (II. 63 ; III. 40). But Thucydides also sees that, things being as they are, it would be idle to expect that a statesman should be bound to act, in his public capacity, the part of a gentleman.

The contrast could be drawn out far. Having begun as an ardent patriot and imperialist, the "philosophic poet" plunged most unphilosophically down an incline of disillusioned pacifism which landed him ultimately (or rather penultimately) into

gloomy misanthropy. All these emotional spasms are reflected in his art. The joyous pride in empire is succeeded by horror at the crimes of empire; and the vision of victory yields to a picture of conquest in which the conquerors figure "as miserable as the conquered, only more cunning and perhaps more wicked." It was the poet's way of sharing in the movements that shook mankind.¹

Of such fluctuations no trace is visible in the work of Thucydides: no syllable betrays the author's feelings at the tragedy acted around him. He was doubtless sufficiently sensitive to the tragedy: the moving character of the narrative is proof enough. But at the same time he was capable of watching its progress with the coolness of a spectator. He does not write as a disenchanted dreamer—one

¹ Professor Gilbert Murray, who has dedicated much time to the study of this dramatist, has traced the effect of the War upon Euripides with consummate skill. But he does not trace it to its psychological cause. Unless I err, here, as in the case of rationalism and religion, we have the same fluid mind closing for a moment round some great problem and drenching it with a froth of superficial enthusiasm, which next moment dissolves into mist—and so on, phase after phase, to the very end. It may sound like blasphemy, but the truth seems to be that Euripides' political, like his social and religious, views lack the coherence which comes from clear and accurate thinking. Hence the failure of the innumerable attempts made to gather from his writings some definite notion of his "philosophy." It is impossible to seize a mind which is not solid enough to be at one with itself. Perhaps this mentality was partly the cause of Aristophanes' unremitting antipathy to Euripides, even when their politics agreed. Nothing annoys a clear-headed man—especially if he be a bigot—more than a would-be leader of thought who does not seem to know exactly what he means. See, for example, the last scene in the *Frogs*, where Euripides' baffling *δόξαφεια* is opposed to Æschylus' *ξύσεως ήκριβωμένης*.

labouring under the shadow of shattered ideals. Heads like his are ill fitted for fancy-woven halos. The most intrinsic feature of his book—a book representing the writing of a lifetime—is the absolute sameness of mental attitude. There are no “phases”—no signs of “development”—no “evolutionary growth.” The writer seems to have been of those people who are born grown up. Witness his settled view of history as mere iteration. It is an essentially adult conception. The young in mind cannot conceive of life as having never more anything new in it ; and it is only they who—noticeably in generations that have lived through a great war—experience that disenchantment which is the natural “reaction” of immaturity to reality.

The generation of Thucydides lived through one of these crises ; and the shock was calculated to unhinge all but the strongest minds. For nearly thirty years the whole Greek world fermented with passions the ferocity of which is hardly comprehensible to us, though our forefathers of the seventeenth century might, and Frenchmen of the Revolution period would, have understood it. Within the main struggle between the Athenian and the Peloponnesian groups—and fiercer still by being confined in a narrower area—went on many civil feuds which led to unspeakable orgies of hate and vengeance. The whole national life, public and private, was poisoned. All that was high and pure

was smothered by baseness, malice and falsehood. Blood and mire had changed the physiognomy of Greece. Idealists saw things which astonished them ; moralists were no longer sure of themselves. Nothing seemed certain save confusion and anguish.

Thucydides, however, having started with no illusions, either as to divine providence or as to human wisdom, suffers no disillusion. Amid the wrecks of men and cities he steers a clear course ; in this tossing sea of madness he holds fast to his own sanity : his feet ever firm upon solid fact. He confronts events as a scientist confronts Nature : aware that what is happening has happened before and will necessarily happen again in the future. A tranquil, well-balanced, wide-eyed intelligence contemplating with intense concentration a political phenomenon—seeing it, not as Euripides saw it, in fragments, fitfully ; but seeing it, and meaning that we shall see it, too, as a coherent chapter of world history. Hence that noble dignity which, in all the years of strife and tumult, maintains its regnant calmness. Unresting, unhasting, the hand draws, stroke by stroke, all that the mind sees, ever true to life—the life which is the same to-day as it was yesterday and as it will be to-morrow. In whatever violent actions engaged, his pen remains steady to that scale—making the great great and the small small, without favour or mercy, without bitterness or bias, but with a serious determination

that his book shall balance with the book of life. Even in the Sphacteria episode, where the historian sacrifices dignity to feeling, a sound sense of values (the ultimate cost outweighing immediate gain) accounts most probably for his momentary loss of philosophic calm. The farther we read on the stronger grows upon us the impression of a man living in severe mental detachment, exempt from passion, superior to prejudice, inaccessible to all ordinary human emotions—living and working on a plane of his own. This is the proper attitude of one not called to bear an active part in current events, but destined by genius to the function of recording and interpreting them for future ages. This remedies the defect of his too great nearness to the events. This throws the events into perspective; and begets that deeper apprehension which links facts together by the relation of cause and effect.

It is an attitude which can easily be misunderstood, and many have imagined the historian as a brain without a heart, as deficient in moral sentiment as he was pre-eminent in intelligence. That Thucydides had a moral heart we see no reason to question, any more than that Machiavelli had a moral heart—though neither wore it on his sleeve. Both accepted the fact that politics are severed from ethics, and, though with very different ends, both studied matters political in the same scientific spirit, uninfluenced by ethical preconceptions. As

Machiavelli treats of statecraft as it is, so Thucydides relates the actions of states as they occurred ; leaving the reader to draw the moral, if he pleases. His point of view might be compared to that of the criminal pathologist who, in investigating a case, ignores its ethical aspect. Science has no concern except the discovery of the truth. Feelings of repugnance are not merely alien but positively obstructive to its vocation. Once get this professional point of view and you almost cease to understand that of the amateur.

Yet (I think I am stating what is not a mere matter of personal opinion) the politician who would look to Thucydides for countenance of the doctrine that, in international relations, the desire of self-aggrandisement not only is, but ought to be, the rule, would look in vain ; while any candid student will find implied throughout his work a contempt for wrong-doing—a sense of right for its own sake—as strong as it is passionless. This disinterested righteousness can hardly be formulated; for neither the sanctions of religion nor the speculations of the schools—the two fountains from which ethical formulas are drawn—enter into it. But Thucydides, without formulating, brings it home, to those at all events who can read a lesson for themselves, as no preacher or propagandist has ever brought it. His very reticence—like the reticence of Nature herself—is a tacit affirmation, which tells

in the end much more than strenuousness of speech, and has the property of invigorating the reader. Everything local, personal, and petty is stricken down in the presence of this high sentiment : and he who chafes at the ethical contradictions of national creeds feels himself at last addressed on grounds which will remain when all else has passed away.

CHAPTER X

ART

Artistic merit is not one of the things Thucydides laid claim to. His book, we have seen, is introduced by a preface in which he informs us that he will be satisfied with a recognition of its mere usefulness: his sole object being to produce an accurate record of what really happened. Had he done this, and nothing more, the result would have been a useful book of reference like those written by Polybius and other historians of a later age, who, heeding the master's precept too well and his practice not enough, laboured, by a single-minded devotion to accuracy, to make their works valuable for all time—and succeeded in making them unreadable in all times.

Thucydides knew better; and it argues considerable *naïveté* in those who, taking his modest advertisement literally, have imagined that he began with the intention of producing a bare text-book, but that, as he went on, new views opened, philosophic ideas sprang up, and artistic tendencies asserted themselves—till at length a journal grew into a masterpiece. What reader of the *Decline and Fall*

has ever been misled by the author's dictum : " Diligence and accuracy are the only merits which an historical writer may ascribe to himself " ? It is the same with Thucydides. Despite his insistence upon truth as the only thing that matters, he wrote as might have been expected from the denizen of a world which revolved between the poles of truth and beauty—which, indeed, was sometimes inclined to regard the two terms as synonymous. His artistic sense was none the less genuine for being unavowed. He felt keenly the difference between a mass of building material, however sound, and a building ; and his work aims at form as well as at strength. That much is certain ; though how far he exercised his art consciously is a question to which different answers might be given by different readers. No one can suppose that his object in writing was primarily artistic.

The division of the work into eight books is purely arbitrary and due to the old editors, some of whom, if we may believe Marcellinus, cut it up into thirteen parts and others otherwise ; the present arrangement having prevailed as the best—or rather for want of a better. The natural division, countenanced by Thucydides himself, is into two sections, each with an introduction of its own : the first containing the events from 431 to 421 (Books I-V. 25) ; the second dealing with the seven years' peace and three years of renewed

hostilities (Books V. 25 -VIII.)—a fragment of what would have been given if the author had lived.

That Thucydides regarded the whole of the twenty-seven years' events as one story from start to finish we know (V. 26). But whether he intended to publish the two sections separately—the one as a sequel to the other—or together, is a speculation—part of the larger problem concerning the composition of his work. How an author wrote is of little more intrinsic importance than what he wrote while writing. And it cannot be denied that the inquiry has given rise to a discussion more voluminous than luminous. Nevertheless, it is neither uninteresting nor unprofitable; and if prosecuted without heat, it may throw some light on the structural peculiarities of the History and thus assist our estimate of Thucydides as an artist.

According to the old view, as we have it in Marcellinus (pp. 5, 9), Thucydides noted down from the beginning of the War all that was said and done without troubling himself about literary form, but only concerned to preserve the facts; subsequently, while in exile in Thrace, he wrote up his memoranda—under a plane-tree.¹ In this idyllic position he remained undisturbed until the middle

¹ ὑπὸ πλατάνῳ (p. 5). I follow the MSS. reading, though I think the suggested emendation ὑπὸ Παγγαίῳ not improbable. Besides his own shortcomings, Marcellinus undoubtedly suffers from the sins of his copyists. E.g. (p. 4, l. 6) he is made to say *διαφθονεῖν*, *to envy*, while, it seems to me, the context cries aloud for *διαφωνεῖν*, *to disagree*.

of the nineteenth century, when F. W. Ullrich came out with his theory that on the termination of the first ten years' war Thucydides composed its story in ignorance of later events, that, when the second war broke out, he left off to await further developments, and after the final peace he sat down again to work over the materials collected in the interval. Against this theory arose a phalanx of scholars, with Classen at their head, stoutly maintaining that Thucydides throughout the twenty-seven years did nothing but take notes, and then, after the close of the War in 404, he wrote the whole History at a stretch.

Needless to say, for neither of these theories can a particle of external evidence be adduced. They both rest entirely upon a study of the book itself. Room is thus left for almost as many conclusions as there are students. The consideration of details has not solved the problem. As we look at the large mass of data from various angles, we find the most awkward contradictions springing up. We move in a region of shifting lights and elusive shapes—a region, moreover, where the differences of opinion are not always absolute, but those of proportion : so that every statement seems to call immediately for qualifications. No useful purpose would be served by going over again a well-trodden ground.¹

¹ Those for whom the details of this discussion have any attraction are referred to L. Herbst's exhaustive article in the *Philologus*, vol. XXXVIII, and to Dr. G. B. Grundy's *Thucydides and the History of His Age*. Appendix, pp. 387-534.

I will therefore consider the matter from another standpoint and write down my thoughts in the order in which they have been developed.

First, I seem to feel it an effort to reconcile a view which shows Thucydides for some thirty years accumulating nebulous reports of battles and revolutions, treaties, notes of statesmen's and generals' speeches, and only afterwards setting out to assort, marshal, weave into a coherent narrative the whole of this heterogeneous material, with the fact that some seven years intervened between the end of the first and the outbreak of the second war. What was he doing all this time ? Thucydides was not a young man : at a moderate computation, before the second war broke out he was getting on for fifty. A man of that age is not inclined to take chances ; and as the first war, in general opinion, was a war by itself, it is hard to believe that he did not compose its story during the interval of peace—this independently of the question whether Thucydides himself did not at that time share the common impression that the war had come to an end : even if he felt that the peace was insecure, he could not possibly have any idea as to how long it would last. But, it may be objected, he was not yet in possession of all the facts—a writer who had set up for himself so high a historical standard would wait for verification of doubtful points and so forth. I will answer this objection : from the outbreak of

the first to the outbreak of the second war nearly seventeen years elapsed, and if Thucydides had not got all the information that could be got in those seventeen years he was not likely ever to get it : with every year that passed the events grew dimmer and the actors and witnesses scarcer. At the worst, he could always revise his original draft.

Again, a man who has spent his prime simply collecting material, by the time he is grown old (at the most likely estimate Thucydides in 404 would be nearly sixty) has lost all desire to write it up. While the passion for accumulation increases, the zest—and the capacity—for composition decreases. Only a man who had cultivated the powers of selection and compression through his maturity would retain them in his decay. One who began writing at an advanced age would be diffuse and discursive. Thucydides is neither. His writing suffers from the defects of age as little as from the defects of youth : it is the writing of a man who, by chance or choice, has reserved his best mental energy until middle life.

All things considered, Classen's view of the composition of the work seems, if not impossible, singularly unreal ; and I will venture to recommend one which, in my opinion, bears a less remote relation to probability, while it explains the peculiarities of the History much more satisfactorily.

It will perhaps be none the worse for including the chief element of Ullrich's theory.

Thucydides, having from the first seen in the Peloponnesian War a congenial subject, undertook to write its history. This undertaking, for which his gifts, his studies, and some practical experience of military and political affairs, had quite specially equipped him, he carried on year after year, jotting down the events as they occurred, correcting and supplementing those original notes as his information increased: when he had collected adequate material for any transaction, he wrote it up. Where he was personally present, the writing up may have been done very soon after the event. This we can safely presume was the case with the Amphipolis business, in which the author himself participated. Also with the Mytilenaeon and the Pylos-Sphacteria episodes. Whether he was present at the debates or not (we have no reason for thinking that he was not), his accounts of them suggest that they were drawn up at the time: especially the last. Although his judgment could only have been confirmed, not altered, by subsequent reflection, it is not likely that his tone would have been the same had he written the story after the lapse of over twenty years, when he would have stood much more objectively towards the things and men concerned. It is an account full of "atmosphere"; and

“atmosphere ” cannot be recaptured twenty years after.¹

The degrees of finish would thus vary in various parts of his manuscript. The most nearly finished is the earlier half—not improbably completed during the interval of peace, which afforded the best opportunities for obtaining full information about the events of the preceding ten years and the tranquillity necessary for literary composition. At the same time, the historian continued his observations on the movements of the peace period, making a special study of the Sicilian Expedition which brought it to a close. As soon as hostilities broke out again he was ready to take up the new threads, to collect fresh material which, at the end of the War, he set himself to work into a second instalment of his History. He had actually completed the Sixth and Seventh Books, which may have been far advanced before the conclusion of final peace, had put together the Fifth, and had written a rather bald draft of the Eighth, when he was cut off by death : the abrupt ending of this Book—in the middle of a statement—indicates, not obscurely,

¹ Note also the repeated description of Cleon in both episodes (III. 36 ; IV. 21). Unless due to interpolation (a desperate view acted upon by Dr. Rutherford in his edition of the Fourth Book), it can hardly be explained on the theory that Thucydides wrote his History at a stretch. But it is intelligible enough if we suppose that each story was composed when the events occurred and that the work was not subjected to a thorough revision.

that he died while at work on it—almost, one might fancy, with the pen in his hand.

The remainder was presumably left in a state too amorphous and fragmentary to admit of piecing together even into a skeleton; and it has been supposed, not without reason, that this raw material was utilised by Xenophon, who continued the story of the Peloponnesian War and who, according to a probable tradition, acted as Thucydides' editor or literary executor. Xenophon has also been credited with the authorship of the Eighth Book. But it has long been agreed that the spirit of Thucydides is all over and through it. The inferiority of its workmanship was very satisfactorily accounted for by those ancient critics who described it as "a rough sketch giving in summary form many things susceptible of embellishment and expansion" (Marcellinus, p. 8).

Whatever its demerits, in one sense the value of this book cannot be exaggerated; for its imperfection declares how much of the best fruit of the author's genius was due to hard and unremitting toil. By comparing it with the rest of the History we get more than a glimpse into Thucydides' industry—we almost see him at work: going over his manuscript again and again, modifying statements by the light of fresh information or maturer reflection, correcting mistakes, supplying omissions, inserting, among other things, into the earlier parts

those remarks which show a knowledge of the whole course of events—bringing to bear on each part the vision acquired from the observation of years. When death overtook him, even Section I. had not been finally revised.

Conclusions in matters of this sort can at best be but conjectures. But if a conjecture becomes the more probable as it tends to explain the greater number of peculiarities and to clear up the greater number of difficulties, then that conjecture may, without presumption, aspire to the dignity of a working hypothesis. On this hypothesis, the History, as we have it, is a book not only unfinished (in both senses of the term), but also composed at different times, extending over a generation. I do not mean to say that the whole work is not informed by one general design. On the contrary, it is the presence of such a design, adopted from the very first and consistently followed throughout, that has averted the chaos which would have overtaken an edifice built under such conditions.

The plan of the structure is simple and dictated by necessity. A history must record events in chronological sequence, year after year. The history of a war naturally divides itself into summers—the campaigning season—and winters, the time for military preparation or diplomatic negotiation. No doubt, such a plan has its drawbacks : it causes the author to shift the scene and to interrupt the

narrative of certain events in order to relate other events because they were concurrent. The reader resents being hurried hither and thither in a manner at once tiring and confusing. But what is the chronicler to do, if he is not to fall hopelessly in arrears? It is a disability inherent in the nature of historical writing—a defect which can, in a measure, be mitigated by judicious grouping, but cannot be altogether avoided. Even historians who made entertainment a principal aim have found it impossible to avoid it, except at a still greater sacrifice of continuity. The truth is, only an account of a single event or limited series of events can achieve absolute organic cohesion. Moreover, it is unjust to criticise with severity a work which, if the author had lived to complete and revise it, would probably have been improved by a better arrangement. He could hardly have failed, for instance, to remove such an indefensible interruption as we have in the Pylos story, where the Syracusan operations (IV. 24-25) can easily be transposed and grouped with the Corinthian (42-49).

Some of these transactions are also—a point not overlooked by critics—very unimportant: minor incidents entitled to little or no notice, certainly not to the amount of space they occupy. The criticism is sound. But, after allowing to it all the weight it possesses, we ought to remember the two limitations under which Thucydides worked. A

novelist, who has only artistic fitness to consider, can take notice of nothing but what may produce an effect; a historian, who must subordinate artistic fitness to historical completeness, is constantly faced by the problem, what to put in and what to leave out—a delicate problem which every historian must solve according to his individual sense of values and conscience. In the last resort, the reader is at liberty to skip what the writer dares not shirk. Further, many things on looking back assume different proportions from those in which they appear at the moment: their relative importance, which must determine the space allotted to them, can only become manifest when time has revealed their consequences, and Thucydides never had the time to review the War as a whole.

That he was not wanting in the power of selection can easily be shown. Throughout the War, whenever the occasion arose, the Athenians accorded those who fell in battle a public funeral; Thucydides describes only the first of these ceremonies (II. 34). The Athenians invaded Megaris every year until Nisaea was taken; Thucydides narrates only the first of these invasions (II. 31. Cp. IV. 66, 69). Nikias sent from Sicily many reports; Thucydides cites only the last (VII. 11). In the same way, out of the numerous battles, sieges, and other transactions, he chooses some for

minute elaboration and disposes of the rest in a few lines. These are proofs of a process of elimination which, because unobtrusive, has not always been appreciated.¹

Parallel to this economy is Thucydides' handling of treaties. In the earlier part we are given a brief summary of the terms and spared the document (I. 44 ; 101 ; 103 ; 117). All the documents inserted bodily occur in the later and less finished parts of the History. From this fact some critics have inferred that their insertion was an afterthought—a new feature added by the author as the result of an enlarged aim for his work. If so, why did he not give the texts throughout ?² It would be absurd to dogmatise upon a subject concerning which all students are equally ignorant ; but I think, until better arguments can be adduced in its favour, the view of a changed aim must remain a theory evolved, as metaphysicians say, out of the inner consciousness.

While the author's desire to deal with his subject as fully as possible has exposed him to the charge of

¹ With his usual acumen, Dionysius of Halicarnassus is at a loss to understand why Thucydides does not describe similar events at similar length : the only reason he can think of is *ῥαθυμία*—slackness. *De Thuc. Hist. Jud.*, 13, foll.

² Macaulay handles the Treaties of Limerick and Ryswick (*History of England*, vol. IV., pp. 104, 796) much as Thucydides does those of Thasos, Samos and Corcyra. No one has ever attributed his practice to an elementary aim. Everyone understands that Macaulay aimed at producing a book, not at providing the raw material for one.

superfluity, his determination to confine himself to it has called forth censures in the opposite sense. Thucydides, it is complained, gives us no biographical notices of the great men who figure on his stage ; he mentions commerce only when it falls into the history of the war ; he tells us absolutely nothing of arts, letters, manners—all those movements which we are accustomed to regard as inseparable from the record of a nation's life. Why critics should demand from the historian of the Peloponnesian War what no one has ever dreamed of demanding from the historians of the Peninsular and Crimean Wars, is not very clear. Certainly there are many things upon which we should have prized a few words from Thucydides. But, though we could wish that the picture had been drawn for us on somewhat less exclusive lines, we cannot say that Thucydides, on the whole, was not well advised in abstaining from the attempt to combine diversity with unity.¹

As it is, notwithstanding the author's purpose to exclude every topic which does not bear directly

¹ This would hold even if the subject of his book was less military. The modern effort to include in political history art, literature, science, and what not, can hardly be considered an artistic success. Eighteenth century historians like Hume and Voltaire had recourse to supplementary essays in which they summed up what, they perceived, could not be brought into the narrative as an integral part of it. Macaulay tried to improve upon this method ; but his famous Third Chapter has no more organic cohesion with the narrative than his predecessors' "supplements" : it is, in fact, only a brilliant appendix gone astray.

upon his main theme, we have a sufficient number of deviations. Thus from Chapter 89 to Chapter 118 of the First Book he goes out of his way to sketch the rise and growth of the Athenian Empire. One feels that this retrospect is not only valuable in itself and necessary to the argument, but very fittingly introduced. It does not need the half-apologetic explanation of the reasons which impelled him to it (I. 97). There follows a string of three more excursions into the past (I. 126, 128-134, 135-138), which we begin by resenting, for, truth to tell, they have little to do with the matter in hand, but end by enjoying. The whole story of the "pollution" is so wonderfully vivid and real that when we come back to the present we feel that the digression has communicated its own vividness to the narrative and enhanced its reality. These are interruptions which we would not forgo. The same, however, cannot be said for (to take only two examples) the dissertation on the early state of Athens (II. 15), or on the plot against the Peisistratids (VI. 54-59)—particularly the latter, which repeats in ampler detail facts already related (I. 20), and repeats them so inappositely and with such unwonted heat that it reads like an answer to invisible opponents.¹ Thucydides is human. He

¹ The suggestion that Thucydides answers criticism of what he had already published was made by Müller-Strübing in the *Jahrbuch für Philologie*, 1883, and is espoused by Dr. Grundy, *Thucydides and the History of His Age*, pp. 424-426. In the

had special information on the subject—more accurate, as he believed, than the popular tradition—and was determined to drag it in at all costs. The first of these discourses may be invaluable to antiquaries, and the second, whatever motive evoked it, supplies another proof of the historian's scrupulous anxiety for exactitude. Nevertheless, the ordinary modern reader cannot pretend to suffer either gladly, while a modern writer would have relegated them both to notes or appendices. To a similar obscurity we would consign the illegitimate and unnecessary discourse about Tereus (II. 29), as well as several other digressions scattered through the History, which obviously are only allowed to remain where they are because the author could not find a better place for them elsewhere. One of the difficulties of writing is how to make known certain things to those who want just that kind of information without boring others. No amount of skill could bring everything into that subtle organism called a book; and an ancient writer had not at his disposal the expedient of the note—a handy

absence of all evidence that Thucydides had ever published anything, I think it safer to explain the tone of the passage as due to personal controversy with people holding a different view. We have a similar, though milder, hint of irritability in his allusion to "those who obstinately maintained opinions based on prophecies" (V. 26). One suspects that the historian of the Peloponnesian War did not bear contradiction meekly. It is, at any rate, certain that the subject afforded matter for acrimonious discussion even to later generations: See Arist. *Ἀθην. Πολιτ.* XVIII.

device, however objectionable in its cruder manifestations.

To the things which clog the narrative may be added Thucydides' enumerations of the belligerent confederates (II. 9), of the Thracian tribes (II. 96-97), of the Sicilian States (VI. 2-5), of the Athenian and Syracusan Allies (VII. 57-59). Here the writer simply treads the beaten track: Herodotus' muster-roll of the Persian, and Homer's of the Greek and Trojan forces, will occur to every reader. It is no derogation from his originality to say that in matters of technique Thucydides conformed to tradition. Truly original minds do not shun established conventions in externals.

A more important point in which Homer had set the example—and was followed by Herodotus, by Thucydides, and, after them, by historians of all nations down to the eighteenth century—was the insertion of speeches: leaders' addresses to their troops, debates, dialogues. The practice served the purpose of giving variety to the narrative and of exhibiting character. Thucydides bettered the instruction. Although characteristic, Homer's speeches add little to our knowledge of the speakers, and that little is of too general a nature to make us feel more than that we have listened to a certain type of person. In Herodotus we find a somewhat higher stage of development; yet of him also the criticism holds good that his characters represent

types rather than individuals. Thucydides goes much farther.¹ His direct portraiture is limited to a few strokes—just enough to keep, as it were, the figures in their places : everything needful for their realisation is provided by the figures themselves. The speeches supply those minor traits by which the secrets of individuality are revealed, while strengthening the outlines as well. We thus gain a much more distinct idea of Pericles' hauteur and of Cleon's truculence by hearing them speak than by being told that the one was haughty and the other truculent. In the same way the contrast between the simple-hearted, straightforward Nikias and the astute egoist Alcibiades is brought into relief by their utterances, while not less clearly stand out the diplomatic tact of Brasidas, the sagacity of Hermocrates, the vivacity of Athenagoras, the prudence of Archidamus, the brusqueness of Sthenelaidas, as disclosed by theirs. Generally, individuality is portrayed with so much consistency and sureness that from this circumstance alone students have inferred a personal acquaintance with the speakers. Such a hypothesis seems almost

¹ The question of the authenticity of the Speeches, I need hardly say, does not enter into the present criticism, which is entirely concerned with their literary treatment. In shaping them as he thought fit the historian made them his own, no less than a dramatist does when he reproduces a historical speech, even though he may give, wherever possible, the very words which had been used. The authenticity of some of the speeches in Shakespeare's historical plays does not affect their significance as specimens of Shakespearean art.

necessary to account for the effect : in no case is there any dimness, any air of distance : every character is presented in the noon-tide light of intimate knowledge. Thucydides achieves all this without any adventitious aid : we are never told what anyone looked like, what he wore, or how he carried himself : there are none of those picturesque touches with which modern historians, like artists who draw directly from the life, adorn their portraits. Everywhere the personation is effected by the speech and the speech only : in strict literal truth the speech *is* the man. How completely this is so may be tested by anyone who, after reading Pericles' speeches and forming his mental picture of the man from them, cares to turn to the memoirs of a contemporary. It is nothing less than startling to find there the statesman described as "presumptuous and conceited in society, with a strong element of arrogance and contempt for others in his grand manner."¹ We do not feel as if Ion had given us any fresh light on the personality of Pericles : what we do feel rather is that he has given a very strong expression to our own thoughts : Pericles in Thucydides' pages is marked by that very air which a man's admirers usually term dignity and his enemies disdain.

Praise of Thucydides implies no disparagement of the other method. Yet it seems to me that, when

¹ Ion of Chios in Plut., *Pericles*, V.

historical writers set out in search of the picturesque, they somewhat strayed from their proper sphere. I do not deny to the historian the privilege of painting. But where, as in character-drawing, the object is comprehension, not illusion, the appeal should be made to the mind rather than to the senses; and I do deny that painting of outward appearances helps us to understand the spirit of men. At any rate, I feel better acquainted with Pericles and Brasidas, though I do not even know the colour of their eyes, than with Carlyle's Frederick or Macaulay's William.

This same quiet skill Thucydides brings to the character-drawing of States. His wish to reinforce formal differentiations of national temper and mentality by dramatic self-revelation is obvious enough; but he does not resort to dialect or any other obvious literary artifice. The Spartan speeches are reported in the same language as the Athenian; and, despite the notorious Laconism, mostly at similar length. He seems to avoid that false air of reality which is the result of superficial imitation, and may be produced so cheaply. In dealing with States, as with individuals, he endeavours not to depict the outward appearance but to disclose the inward essence of things. And he succeeds wonderfully well: it is not only the different complexion which each side puts upon the matter under discussion that creates a differentiation

—clear and strong—in the reader's mind. Even more than the tenor of the speech is the speaker's tone, which constitutes a peculiar feature. No one could, for instance, mistake the national and imperial self-assertiveness of the Athenians: that "take it or leave it" attitude—that mania of self-will. Athens, through the mouths of her spokesmen, takes on a personality, as it were. And the same applies to Sparta, Corinth, Corcyra, Thebes—the character of every nation in the History is thus indirectly communicated, and its individuality revealed by itself.

By this method Thucydides not only attains his aim, but he attains it without any apparent effort: So that one is tempted to ask, how far was he deliberately manipulating his material to artistic ends? Contrivance of some sort must always be used in reducing from the life; and in keeping down accessories Thucydides seems to have been aware that the rendering of a feeling postulates the suppression of non-significant facts. Else it is difficult to understand how he managed, even in his longest speeches, to maintain so marvellously the sense of tone and to produce a continuity of impression such as is rarely found outside the works of professed literary craftsmen.

Looked at in reference to their immediate objects, the speeches deserve greater commendation than they have received. What could be more to the

purpose than the arguments by which Pericles vindicates his policy (I. 140-144 ; II. 60-64), or those by which the Corcyraeans and the Corinthians uphold their respective positions (I. 32-43) ? In the pleadings of the Plataeans and the Thebans, too (III. 53-67), each side makes out such a strong case that, his sympathy with the former notwithstanding, the reader, after listening to both, is hard put to it to decide. Here it is impossible to resist the suspicion that Thucydides found for the dull Boeotians (their traditional reputation is faithfully maintained on another occasion—IV. 92) much better arguments than they could have found for themselves. Likewise where Diodotus pleads for the Mytilenaeen rebels—waving aside all considerations of justice and basing his argument (as Edmund Burke did in speaking for the American colonists) solely upon the ground of political expediency (III. 42-48)—every passage seems to bear the marks of the author's superior faculties. Diodotus being otherwise unknown, we cannot help thinking that, though preserving the substance of his plea, Thucydides may himself have furnished the eloquence. At any rate, his speech has about it the ring of reality. Cleon's denunciation of the Mytilenaeans as a people who, intoxicated by prosperity and driven by insolence into the wildest schemes of ambition, put might before right (III. 39) may sound fantastic in the mouth of an Athenian orator, and one who

had just declared that the Athenian Empire was a despotism which could only be maintained by brute force ; but life is full of such ironies, and he who will not perceive them is not a realist.

Reality, too, breathes through the Corinthians reiterated and overstrained contrast between Athenian energy and Spartan apathy (I. 70). The speakers, intent upon goading their hearers to action, labour this one point, return to it again and again, rub it in, almost at the risk of being offensive. That is how I interpret what has been cited by some as an illustration of the historian's poverty of ideas—not less strange a conclusion than that of callousness drawn by others from Diodotus' disregard of appeals to mercy !

But the most striking example of actuality which Thucydides has given us is the Funeral Oration. The orator's purpose is twofold : to depict Athens as the Athenians liked to see her, and in glorifying the city to glorify the men who had laid down their lives in her defence. Both aspects of the speech were utilised in England at the beginning of the Great War. The first inspired our public speakers and writers to imitation almost amounting to plagiarism ; the second was reproduced in a leaflet and sent to our soldiers and sailors. How the rank and file were affected by the words of Pericles we have no means of knowing ; but one who read the speech in Gallipoli has left upon record

his appreciation of it as "the supreme tribute to the fallen soldiers of a free state for all time."

In this phrase—"for all time"—we have the surest key-word to Thucydides' Speeches, and the reason why he mostly keeps out of them those topical details which, we are told, "give point and flavour to every great speech by every real orator"—how ephemeral the point and how evanescent the flavour may be seen by any newspaper reader : the very touches that are most telling one day need explanation the next. The qualities which make for permanence are not altogether those which make good popular oratory at the moment. True, the speeches in the History are more general and more philosophical than any delivered by the average "real orator." But Thucydides has expressly told us that he aimed at a possession for ever rather than at the rhetorical triumph of an hour. Appropriateness to the passing occasion had to be combined with applicability to every parallel occasion bound to arise in the natural course of things.¹ Such was his aim ; and the fact that a speech made for 431 B.C. has been found useful in

¹ A similar universality, in a minor degree, belongs to the speeches of Edmund Burke, which, like the speeches of Thucydides, although calculated to meet a situation of the moment, are not bounded by local and temporary circumstances ; with the result that the orator who was accused of being "too deep for his hearers" continues a source of inspiration to innumerable readers.

1914 A.D. gives the measure of his success.¹ He knew, what many a modern realist has yet to learn, that the essential alone is real always and everywhere.

Regarded in relation to the narrative, the orations, like the digressions, arouse in the reader mixed feelings. It would be incorrect to say of all of them that they do not spring from the story, but are fitted into it. Some are expected and consequently their occurrence causes no impatience. Thus we come to the Funeral Oration prepared to listen to a long declamation, and we listen to it with deepening attention and delight. Similarly we welcome, besides the debates already mentioned, the speech of Alcibiades (VI. 89)—far from obstructing, it adds, reveals, and forms a turning-point. On the other hand, we could dispense with the speech of Brasidas (V. 9), which breaks into the story without adding anything to it; but those few lines give a finishing touch to the portrait of Brasidas and provide an artistic foil for the scene of his death immediately following. It is not easy, however, to

¹ I did not propose to labour this point any further. But a fresh illustration which has recently come to light is too instructive to be omitted. The definition of aggression in the Geneva Protocol, as the refusal to submit a dispute to arbitration, has now been traced to the speech of the Corcyraeans (I. 34). It appears that the passage was utilised by General Bliss in a plan which he, with Professor Shotwell and other Americans, had prepared and communicated to the French and British Prime Ministers.—See David Mitrany, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in the *Manchester Guardian*, March 14th, 1925.

justify some other speeches, which only retard the action, and to such a degree that one feels forced to skip them (e.g. VI. 33-41 ; 76-87). On the whole, the oratorical parts of the History, to be thoroughly enjoyed, must be read by themselves. Their difficulty alone constitutes too great a distraction from the narrative.¹

We have dwelt long on the Speeches because, though not untainted with the rhetorical vices of his age, they would alone have entitled Thucydides' work to the highest rank in literature.

The Dialogues can be treated more briefly. Of these the first (II. 71-74) deserves praise for its energy and dignity, and the second (III. 113) for its terse liveliness. The third—which occurs in the unfinished part of Book V.—deserves to rank among the writer's most notable and disappointing performances. No judge, however indulgent, but must condemn it unhesitatingly. Not on the grounds

¹ This feeling, it would appear, was shared by Thucydides' contemporaries. One of them, Cratippus, is reported as saying that the Speeches "not only stood in the way of the actions, but were wearisome to the hearers" (οὐ μόνον ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐταῖς ἐμποδῶν γεγενῆσθαι λέγων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἀκούουσιν ὀχληρὰς εἶναι.). He adds that Thucydides, "having perceived this, omitted speeches in the latter parts of the History" (τοῖτό γέ τοι συνέντα αὐτόν, ἐν τοῖς τελευταίοις τῆς ἱστορίας φησὶ μηδεμίαν τάξαι ῥητορείαν).—Dion. Hal. *De Thuc. Hist. Jud.* 16, which statement some modern critics have taken to imply that the earlier parts were published by the historian himself, or that he noticed such a change in Attic eloquence that he felt what he had already written was becoming antiquated. Perhaps we shall be nearer the mark if we interpret Cratippus to mean that Thucydides read his manuscript to his friends and found that the speeches bored them.

on which Dionysius condemned it: because the Athenian Republic is made to appear as lawless, cynical, and careless of aught but interest and brute force. To a teacher of rhetoric under Augustus this seemed a shocking misrepresentation of Athens' real character. So he pronounced the Dialogue a dramatic failure.¹ We read it with different eyes—with a knowledge of the language used to small neutral states by the representatives of great Powers laying the same claims to civilisation as Athens—a knowledge that was not his. And to us the very ground on which he condemned the performance is the one extenuating circumstance in its favour. As an essay in characterisation, the Melian Dialogue possesses very great merit. What shocks us is something else. Parts of it are direct and powerful, such as the immortal definition of the "rights" of the weak (V. 89). The rest—mere degrees of flabbiness: here confused, there loose and wordy, as if the pen ran away with the author. Nevertheless, even the Melian Dialogue is valuable, if for nothing else, because in it we are allowed to see a great writer at his worst.

Let us pass to another aspect of Thucydidean art. But first a word of warning, which might perhaps have been uttered sooner. Nothing is more deceitful than general laws for our feelings. Most aesthetic verdicts when examined prove mere

¹ Dion. Hal. *De Thuc. Hist. Jud.*, 39-41.

personal preferences in disguise. To be sure, as in the domain of ethics there are a few fundamental commandments, so in the domain of aesthetics there are a few elementary principles of universal validity—which every normal human being, irrespective of country or age, recognises as true. But beyond these highways of common experience which make the whole world kin, lies a vast web of tracks crossing each other in an infinite variety : they are so intricate, so faint, and so subject to the shifting winds of fashion, that the acutest explorer could scarcely seize upon any single thread and follow it through to a definite issue. The absence of any fixed canon of determination, except on the few big lines, gives a wide range to individual judgment. The same objects will produce different effects upon different spectators ; and it would be vain to attempt any such general exposition of artistic excellence as should carry conviction to all minds. In short, much of the following criticism is inevitably subjective and will appeal only to people who belong to the same type as the critic.

It is an ancient opinion that in his narrative generally—not only in the mechanics of it—Thucydides worked on the model of Homer. We cannot, after scanning with meticulous diligence the pages of the historian, discover any proofs of such influence. The most conspicuous trait of Homer's descriptive art—the use, or abuse, of epithets and

similes which come here single, there in battalions—is most conspicuously absent from the work of Thucydides. The Homeric directness of observation and homeliness of expression are undoubtedly present in the History as much as they are in the Bible. These qualities, while giving freshness even to his weaker work, set off, as they alone can, the virility of his stronger. But are these among the things one writer can learn from another? are they not rather the spontaneous outcome of faculties which every child possesses by right of birth and a few great men preserve by right of genius?

Be this as it may, Thucydides is master of his method. He describes vividly, yet with simplicity, shunning simile and refraining from adjectives; as though to create the illusion that he is not drawing a picture but merely presenting a chain of facts, unfolded in a series of hard, bare substantives. It does not sound attractive, but every word tells, and the upshot is something infinitely rarer than a picture—a piece of concrete reality.

One of the best, if slightest, of his descriptions is about the sun, and deserves to live as long: "The same summer, at the beginning of a new lunar month (the only time at which it appears possible) the sun was eclipsed after midday, and became full again after it had assumed a crescent form, and after some of the stars had shone out" (II. 28, Dale's tr.). In reading this charming little etching

we ask ourselves : Now is that art or artlessness ? It might have been laboured out ; it might just have come like that.

Here is another, which has more emotion for the heart than charms for the eye. A small town was one morning surprised by a horde of barbarians who "sacked both houses and temples and slaughtered the inhabitants, sparing neither old nor young, but killing one after another all whom they met, the women even and the children, and the very beasts of burden, every living thing which they saw." All this is general, and being general would remain shadowy ; so the author invests it with distinctness by the addition of one vivid particular : "and falling upon a boys' school, the largest in the place, which the boys had just entered, they cut down every one of them " (VII. 29). Dissimilar in all other respects, both descriptions, it will be noted, are alike in their plain and unadorned matter-of-factness.

Whenever, as is not seldom the case, the subject lends itself to dramatic treatment, then Thucydides rises to a height unscaleable by any other historian. In the "Pollution" (I. 128-134) we have a great example of his manner—homely and grand at the same time. He does not merely delineate the character of Pausanias, he makes the whole period come to life : we see the people, we hear them speak, we are entirely transported back into their

world. Every detail is moving up to the tragic end of the traitor-king in the unroofed shrine.

The battle scenes also are not only managed with a grasp so complete that every movement is brought before us clear—with this an ordinary historian might be content: they awake in us a response which sometimes is so strong that we become participators in the action. Take, for example, the sea-fight between the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans. The whole of it is handled in such a way as to make the reader believe that he is really looking at the scene described; but what appeals most to the present critic is the latter part, from the sudden appearance of the strange ships over the horizon. As they sail up through the dusk, we feel the uncertainty of those who did not know what ships they were, and having shared their anxiety, we share their relief—we are brought, as it were, along with the ships to harbour (I. 50-51).

The subdued ending—"and they came to anchor"—illustrates the tendency of Greek art to relax the strain at the finish. Instead of a violent climax which leaves the spectator excited, we have action melting delicately away to repose and leaving us in a meditative mood: it is a dramatic, as distinguished from a melodramatic, close, and as good an instance as can be found of the differences of classical from modern taste.

It is not confined to dramatic action. We have

a similar ending in the Funeral Oration : " And now, when you have duly lamented each your own dead, you may go away " (II. 46), and again in the account of the Plague. There the author intimates that he notes all the circumstances by which the disease may be recognised should it reappear hereafter. Medical men—so far as I can learn—have not found these notes very helpful for purposes of diagnosis. But, though doctors may deny scientific value to the record, no man will deny its artistic spell. The sights, the sounds, and the sultry air of the stricken city are around us—an abiding scene and one fraught with suggestion. After all the symptoms of the pestilence are forgotten, we remember how the sick crawled about the fountains, and those who had no one to look after them threw themselves into the cisterns maddened with fever ; how the whole, driven by necessity to indecency, would make free of the pyres prepared for others, or would fling their own dead upon the half-burnt bodies of strangers—"and go away " (II. 52).

The reason why these details remain deeply engraven on our memory is obvious : they are striking because they are strange. It is not so easy to explain the durability of the impression made by another kind of details which every now and then meet our eye. The besieged Plataeans, when they decided to make scaling ladders for a sortie, measured the height of the enemy's wall *by counting*

the layers of bricks, where the wall happened to be imperfectly plastered (III. 29). The Athenian soldiers at Pylos, when they started to fortify the post, *for want of hods carried the mortar on their backs, stooping and clasping their hands behind them* (IV. 4). When the decree condemning all the Mytilenaeans to death was rescinded and a trireme was despatched with the reprieve, the rowers, not to waste a minute, *continued rowing while they ate barley paste kneaded with olive oil and wine* (III. 49). The Potidaeans capitulated on the terms that they should go out of the place with one dress each—but *the women with two* (II. 70).

Each one of these minute particulars lights up and makes the whole picture live. But why? how? What is there that so impresses us? There is nothing in these details which any fanning of the imagination can kindle into aught of the sublime or the beautiful. They are common—homely. Perhaps (the answer comes suddenly) they fascinate just because they are common and homely. It is because they partake of the ordinary—which is always with us—that they have the power of bringing near the old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago—of fixing in the mind for ever images which might otherwise have left but a transient impression.

While not allowing the smallest detail to escape him, Thucydides overdoes nothing. He says no

more than is necessary. Only once or twice does he transgress the rule of the golden mean. In general, he adheres to it almost too strictly : that is, in these days, when the deliberate enhancement of every telling effect is accounted a literary virtue, so severe a self-control may seem a fault.

Closely related to this avoidance of superfluous emphasis is another trait. Animated as his descriptions are, they contain no trace of the writer's own feelings. Even in the most tragic situations, Thucydides carries self-suppression to the extreme, rousing our emotions through sheer force of presentation. Witness his account of the Corcyraean massacre (IV. 46-48). There are no screams, no tears, no emotional expressions. The atrocity expresses itself in the facts, and from these alone we realise the horror. We realise it, perhaps, the more intensely and the more poignantly thanks to the absence of any comments. Of course, tastes differ. Many require the guide's patter, where a visitor of another sort resents it as an impertinence and a hindrance. In like manner, where one reader would pronounce that Thucydides has failed to express the pathos of suffering, there to another his success may be most triumphantly manifest. For myself, the effect is unquestionable. The only question is, whether Thucydides produces it consciously.

Such a question arises even concerning the effects of professed artists. As Emerson has shrewdly

observed, "we are unwilling to impute our best sense of any work of art to the author. The highest praise we can attribute to any writer, painter, sculptor, builder, is, that he actually possessed the thought or feeling with which he has inspired us." Nowhere is uncertainty more justifiable than in the case of Thucydides.

Those who look upon the History as essentially a work of art will, doubtless, detect a careful adaptation of means to an aesthetic end. Others, for whom Thucydides is primarily a thinker, attaining his subtlest effects by felicities of genius—an instinctive perception of fitness—rather than by conscious mastery of art, will be disposed to ascribe his treatment of these scenes to his philosophic detachment. Much could be said for both opinions. But very little for another, which finds in his reticence proof of indifference to human suffering; and scarcely more for the apology offered by some, that the brutalities of ancient warfare would naturally have a hardening effect. In our experience, brutality is not the monopoly of antiquity, and, paradoxical though it may sound, those most familiar with war are the least callous to its horrors. Nor could a greater mistake be made than to measure a man's sensibility by his artistic tears.

However, of such speculations there is no end. We cannot penetrate into the writer's heart: his book only is open to observation; and as in the

case of his alleged lack of a moral sense because he does not preach, so in the case of his alleged lack of human sympathy because he does not weep, we can only fall back upon our general impression of the tone of his narrative. Without attempting the impossible task of separating the thinker from the artist, or either from the man, I would say that in this, as in every other aspect of his work, the author exhibits a character too aristocratic for popular criticism.

Two departures from Thucydides' habitual austerity may be specially noted. In telling how the population of Athens went down to the harbour to see the grand fleet sail for Sicily (VI. 30, 2-31), he warms and spreads himself in description of feelings to an unusual degree and to many critics' unaffected delight. One hesitates to offer criticism which may sound harsh, but (*εἰ δ' ἔστιν ὁσιόν μοι καὶ θεμιτὸν εἰπεῖν ἃ φρονῶ*), the passage seems to contain little above the powers of an average journalist. A similar lapse is presented by the last naval battle between the Athenians and the Syracusans, where he paints the excitement of the men on the shore, depicting the very gestures by which they expressed their emotions (VII. 71). With all due deference to Grote who has lauded this picture and to Gibbon who has copied its liveliest trait, I must confess that, in my humble opinion, here Thucydides—not to put too fine a point upon

it—has come perilously near to melodrama. One feels that in these two cases, both of which occur in the same story, the author has departed from his natural manner : he has exchanged, as it were, the statuesque for the picturesque—and that the experiment is not a success. For, without pushing the analogy too far, Thucydides' descriptive art, in the main, bears a closer affinity to sculpture than to painting.

Of all the portions of Thucydides' History, that which best illustrates his art is the Seventh Book. Here the narrative suffers very little by deviations, declamations and documents. Besides the catalogue of Athenian and Sicilian allies (57-59), we have only one letter (11-15) which blends with and enhances the reality of the story ; and three addresses to troops (61-64, 66-68, 77), all coming in so naturally as to produce life-like scenes and characters ; while a debate is given in the form of summaries of opinion (47-49).

The reason for the absence of speeches lies among the things we shall never know. In regard to the Eighth Book, where likewise we have arguments set forth in the third person, there is a prevalent belief that they would have been elaborated into direct orations had the author lived to finish his work. Such an explanation could hardly apply to the Seventh Book. Of all the writings of Thucydides it is the most finished—the most distinct in its

symmetry and intensity. It is easier to believe that he would have eventually trimmed some of the other books more nearly to this pattern than that he would have embroidered this one. However, theories are no great matter.

In this book the author's gift for carefully planned and vigorously sustained narrative finds its widest scope and highest expression. The story moves on to the piteous close with such unity that it is hard to single out particular episodes. Take, however, as specimens of animated action the eerie night battle on Epipolæ heights (43-44), "the only one of the kind which occurred during the war"; the last naval engagement in Syracuse harbour, all tumult and uproar; and, above all, the disorderly retreat with the scenes which thickly strew its whole course (75 foll.). We look upon the worn-out Nikias trying to inspire his men with a faith he himself could no longer feel—upon the sick and wounded staggering after their departing comrades and praying not to be left behind—upon the forlorn attempts to break through passes and rivers held by the enemy—upon the surrender of the exhausted troops—all ending with the remnants of the great Athenian army herded in the quarries of Syracuse. The writing, with one solitary exception, is quite restrained; but the emotion packed into it is tremendous: from the very first everything contributes, we know not how, to create a vague feeling

of uneasiness—a shadow which hangs over and pervades all, gradually deepening and preparing our minds for the inevitable doom. Beyond a doubt it is Thucydides' crowning achievement. Nothing he has written more gloriously reveals that combination of qualities which we so seldom meet with among historians—the union in one and the same man of literary power, philosophic insight, and practical familiarity with the conduct of great affairs. The Gallipoli Expedition—a disaster on a vastly larger scale—for want of such a master has already become, even to those who took part in it, a bewildering blur of motive and action, while the Sicilian Expedition—a comparatively petty event of a remote past—thanks to Thucydides, lives in our imaginations as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the world.

It is not, however, the analysis, but the aggregate of features that makes up a physiognomy. After most of the incidents with which the History is concerned have faded from our minds, we retain an indelible impression of it as a whole. This impression might perhaps be summed up in the term applied by the Greeks to the Doric order of architecture—masculine. In it nothing is sacrificed to mere grace. Its lines are robust ; its ornamentation sober ; the general effect is one of power and austere simplicity. True, it lacks the smoothness and symmetry of a Doric temple, reminding us

rather of those massive fabrics of irregular blocks anterior to the appearance of the orders in architecture. Yet those blocks are well fitted together. The builders scamped nothing. And thus it is with the fabric which Thucydides has raised. The real secret of its strength is its antique honesty. Not a line is perfunctorily done, is less than it claims to be. Some of the very blemishes which spoil the History as a work of art are due to this over-rigid conscientiousness. Into the labour of composition Thucydides brought the same self-imposed rule which he followed with such scrupulous diligence in his investigations. That faithfulness which lay within him and commanded that every relevant fact and circumstance, even the smallest, should be carefully collected and ascertained, also compelled that they should be arranged and fitted together to the best possible advantage. He took for himself and offered to others the lowest, from a literary point of view, estimate of his business—usefulness. Yet he worked up to the highest literary standard within his reach ; and performed the task of a chronicler in the spirit of an artist.

CHAPTER XI

STYLE

On comparing Thucydides' style, in the narrowest sense of the term, with that of Herodotus, we see at once the transition from a simple co-ordination to a subordination of clauses—the beginning of a process which culminated in the Demosthenic periods. This feature has often been noticed. But what, I think, has passed unnoticed is that it marks a step not merely in the linguistic but in the intellectual and artistic growth of Greece. It is only one of many signs, all pointing to a like movement. The rows of figures in primitive sculpture had yielded to organic combinations or groups ; the monotonous verse of primitive poetry had developed into metrical harmonies of infinite complexity ; out of the primitive goat-dance had been evolved an intricate dramatic representation ; from a few elementary maxims elaborate systems of philosophy had arisen. In every department of life and thought—turn wherever you may—you are confronted with expressions of that spirit which differentiated more and more the Hellenic from the stunted civilisations

of the East and created the contrast between Oriental and Occidental. The transition from the λέξις εἰρομένη of Herodotus to the λέξις κατεστραμμένη of Thucydides is but another manifestation of this general progress—due directly to the Sophists who brought their acute minds to bear upon the subject of language, and to the orators who put theory into practice.

To this extent Thucydides' style may be regarded as a product of the age in which he had his being. For the rest, it is a style essentially his own : his own by peculiar words and still more by a peculiar collocation of words—so much so that even his warmest admirers regard many of his pages with consternation.

It is not that he uses a motley language which, though in the main Attic, is interlarded with Ionic archaisms, with poetical expressions, and with what seem like coinages of his own. Neither antiquated, nor poetical, nor manufactured words, neither exotic idioms nor any number of individual mannerisms could inspire consternation. Harte wrote a history in a style which Lord Chesterfield described as "a bad style of a new and singular kind—full of Latinisms, Gallicisms, Germanisms, and all *isms* but Anglicisms." Johnson was pleased to stagger his hearers with things like "labefaction" when he might have said loosening. Carlyle would write "epicedal" where an ordinary man would have

written funereal. Or, let us glance at an age more akin to that of Thucydides, the age before Dryden, when our language, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, "was considered by every writer as a subject on which he might try his plastic skill, by moulding it according to his own fancy." In that age of literary anarchy we find Milton experimenting in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew idioms; pressing into his service all sorts of elements from distant regions, sometimes by sheer violence—even Sir Thomas Browne, a fastidious prosaist, luxuriating in linguistic innovation and improvisation; revelling in home-made whims and foreign oddities—to such a degree that often what he writes might be taken for a caricature of his own style. Writers have their perversities like other mortals.

The case of Thucydides is more serious than any known to the nosology of letters. Nowhere else in literature, strictly so called, do we meet with such confusion of the natural order of words, such contortions and incoherencies—a tangled jungle bristling with solecism, through which sentences involved and swollen by parenthetical matter begin somewhere, wind their tortured course somehow, to end desperately anywhere and anyhow. I speak of the Greek text, for translators pass their steam-roller over the rough places so thoroughly as to remove all traces of their original ruggedness.

It is not my intention to turn this essay into a

technical dissertation. I will only quote a few examples by way of illustration. Take this passage which hits the eye in the very preface of the book : " But as many as shall desire both of the events which have happened to contemplate the certainty and of the events which will hereafter again, according to the way of human things, such or such like happen, to judge these profitable will be enough " (I. 22). That is the sort of prose Thucydides is capable of. Yet with what a facile smoothness it flows in Jowett's translation : " But if he who desires to have before his eyes a true picture of the events which have happened, and of the like events which may be expected to happen hereafter in the order of human things, shall pronounce what I have written to be useful, then I shall be satisfied." Dale's version is nearer to the original.¹

Take another, this time from the Melian Dialogue. The Melians try to convince the Athenians of the expediency of moderation : " and this is not less to your own interest," they say, " inasmuch as of the heaviest vengeance, should you fall, an example you would become to others " (V. 90). The construction here seems tolerable, but the meaning

¹ I take this opportunity of expressing my warm appreciation of this work by Henry Dale (Bohn's Classical Library). Its few mistakes lie on the surface and cannot mislead (such as the rendering of " cannibals " for " raw flesh eaters," III. 94). Its merits go deeper. I have never seen a translation which so faithfully reproduces not only the sense but (a far greater feat) the style of the author.

is darker than suits the ease of the plain man. "Can the sense be," asks the Headmaster of Rugby in distress, "'inasmuch as you, if you deal with us thus cruelly, would become an example to others, should you fall from your present greatness, teaching them to inflict the heaviest vengeance upon you' ? or 'an example of moderation to others, because you have been so heavily punished for your tyranny ?'" The Master of Balliol is equally at a loss : so he adopts one view in his text and gives the other in a footnote.

And yet another, from the same unhappy conversation : "Consider then, when we have withdrawn also, and reflect again and again that you are deliberating about your country which about one and in one deliberation both having prospered and not having succeeded it will be" (V. 111). The sense is not doubtful : "that you are deliberating about your country, your one and only country, and that the prosperity or ruin of it depends upon this one deliberation." But to say, with Dr. Arnold, that "the construction here is desperate," would almost be carrying kindness beyond the bounds of Christian charity. The construction here is delirious.

Passages in all points worthy of these are to be found throughout the History, wedged like lumps of barren quartz in beds of noblest gold. If they occurred in the Speeches only, one might perhaps

have supposed them to be an attempt at realism : few speeches, were they reported as delivered, would be free from grammatical embarrassment. But they are just as frequent in the narrative : so much so that many commentators either pass over in silence or with indulgence verbal jumbles which, in any other author, would have provoked considerable comment. Their tolerance probably arises from sheer weariness of spirit ; for there is hardly a page which does not contain a sentence violating every law of a sentence.

Of course, a man of genius, whether he likes it or not, is in his language, as in his life, to some extent, his own legislator. A master mind will subordinate to its dictates the common speech, will stamp upon it its personal impress. But, however much the use which men of genius make of the language of their race may differ from the normal use, the normal use is the basis of it all—the individual style stands upon the common speech and derives from it its spirit as the tree derives its sap from the parent soil. The style of Thucydides goes beyond not only the privileges, but even the aberrations of genius. It has been a scandal and a stumbling-block to the learned for two thousand years ; and his commentators are at great pains to account for it.

Some of the old scholars, rather than admit a defect in their idol, strove to represent it as a merit : he is difficult and obscure on purpose,

thinks the sagacious Marcellinus, that he may be understood and appreciated only by the select few. Which is as it may be. Some of the modern ones have endeavoured to excuse what they dared not condone by urging that Thucydides wrote at a time when Greek prose had not yet developed sufficiently to cope with the ideas which surged in the Greek head. But as the same pleaders have to confess that Thucydides' own reputed teacher Antiphon—to say nothing of Andokides or of his younger contemporaries Lysias and Xenophon, notorious masters of easy lucidity—is far from obscure or ungrammatical, their plea must be dismissed summarily. They have, however, an alternative argument. The brain of Thucydides, they claim, is not like other brains: it is a brain which subtilises, which rationalises, which concentrates, which, shortly, seethes with a crowd of thoughts pressing for an exit; and, it would seem, no language is wide enough to let them out in decent order. Further, it is pointed out, Thucydides tries to pack much thought into a few words: pregnant brevity (*πολύους βραχυλογία*) is one of his salient characteristics. We may admit this plea, but only within limits. Indistinct utterance sometimes is the result of fecundity: a facile pen does not always go with a full mind; and, where philosophical reflections are concerned, our author does seem to labour with a thought greater than he can

find words to communicate. But—what strikes one in many of Thucydides' most confused passages is not the plethora, but the poverty of thought. They are mere orgies of impossible grammar, resembling nothing so much as an illiterate person's vain struggles with the pen.

It is the recognition of this fact that has led some critics to the conclusion that where we find the writing perplexed we must blame not Thucydides—a man who thought so clearly and coherently, as the historian unquestionably did, could not fail to express himself clearly and coherently: the fault lies with the manuscripts which have come down to us—the earliest of them not being older than the tenth century, being, that is, the outcome of successive transcriptions during more than thirteen hundred years. Although the view rests partly on a false assumption (clear and coherent thought may exist with or without adequate talent for its expression) it cannot be denied that those who hold it have a strong case.

When a book was transcribed, often from dictation, by ill-educated or careless copyists, it was inevitable that the transcript, unless thoroughly checked, should leave their hands in a form more or less differing from the original: words would be misspelt, omitted, or misplaced—whole sentences might be left out or transposed; and if the manuscript from which the copy was made contained

abbreviations and contractions, as it frequently did, the results would be such as every author who has entrusted his manuscript to a typist or gone over rough printer's proofs can imagine. A subsequent attempt at correction by some reader might very well have led to a further departure from the original wording. To these dangers must be added another, perhaps graver than any. No writer who has ever written is less fitted for the honourable function of educating the young. His spirit is above the heads of pupil and ordinary teacher alike ; his style is a pernicious model for either. Yet, by a whimsical dispensation of Fortune, Thucydides since the first century B.C. was doomed to the classroom : he became the greatest authority on recondite grammar and abstruse syntax—a master of Attic who had expended stupendous energies in evolving long and difficult sentences, to escape being comprehended by the plain man. This created a demand for annotated editions—texts every blank space in which, both on the margins and between the lines, invited the scholiast's pen : errors, real or imaginary, would be rectified ; deficiencies, real or imaginary, would be supplied ; the abstruse would be illustrated ; the obvious elucidated. These marginal and interlineal comments by editors varying in degree of competence would tend, through the inadvertence of stupid or sleepy copyists, to creep into the text—until one way and another passage

after passage might undergo transformations calculated to mystify the author himself. All classical writers have passed through this ordeal more or less scathed, and as there are parts in Thucydides which can be shown to have been tampered with, we may reasonably suspect a like tampering with others.

But when from the theory of corruption we come to the practice of correction—then the question raises some points of great delicacy.

It does not follow that a passage is spurious because, either in matter or in form, it is unworthy of the author. When Voltaire's *Micromégas* was published competent critics familiar with his earlier work refused to believe in its genuineness. Of Sir Thomas Browne's *Christian Morals* it has been well said that, were not the evidence for its genuineness convincing, we might take it for the work of a clumsy imitator rather than for the mature production of the author of *Religio Medici*. Every writer when compared with himself will be found unequal. Such inequalities are particularly to be expected in the work of a writer whose composition, scattered over a period of thirty years or more, could scarcely help presenting the varieties and irregularities of a rambling structure which had been added to from time to time.

This is a cause of lack of uniformity (more specifically in the usage of words) the influence of

which seems to have been very imperfectly estimated by Thucydidean students. In like manner, much may be attributed to the author's anxiety for accuracy and completeness, coupled with the accident of the book being left unfinished at his death, including a number of duplications. Thus, in IV. 134 we have a battle described twice over: the author, after composing one account, would seem to have composed another and to have written it down with a view to choosing eventually between the two or merging the two into one. Elsewhere we have the reasons why Nikias wanted to persevere in the siege of Syracuse stated no less than three times within a few lines (VII. 48. 2; 48. 5 49. 1). Even if there were no other evidence that the History was left in an unfinished state, I should have suspected the fact from these repetitions. Not, of course, that repetitions constitute in themselves an indication—much less a proof—of unrevision. They occur in modern books which have been revised by their authors. But it seems highly unlikely that a fault of this kind would be committed by an author whose characteristic foible is excessive economy, not prodigality of words.

In other cases it is impossible to determine whether a manifest addition is due to the author himself or to an interpolator or to both. Witness the contumelious reference to Hyperbolus (VIII. 73), the genuineness of which has been suspected on account

of the unique violence of its tone. It could also be questioned on structural grounds (note the crude iteration. ἐπιθήσασθαι . . . ἐπιτιθέσθαι). Taking a middle course, one might conjecture that Thucydides himself added the *fact* that Hyperbolus was murdered, intending to fuse this addition eventually into the preceding sentence, but that the onslaught upon the demagogue came from another hand. And in support of such a hypothesis one might argue that “rascally” (μοχθηρὸς) occurs nowhere else in the History, and that “for his knavery” (διὰ πονηρίαν) is an expression Thucydides did not use even in speaking of Cleon, while both words are used by Aristophanes in connection with Hyperbolus.¹ These things would suggest a bit of the comedian imported into the text by some alien hand. But, on the other side, it ought to be considered that what Thucydides says of Cleon also finds its match in the same play.² That being so, is it not possible that the Aristophanic touch here comes from the historian's own pen? As to the violence of the tone, who can assure us that it would not have been softened down on revision? The passage occurs in the Eighth Book—a rough draft.

¹ *Knights* (produced in 424 B.C.), 1303-4; *Clouds*, 1066. The historian's *τινα* might also, at first sight, seem an odd way of referring to a notorious party leader in 411, while it was quite apt thirteen years before when the comedian used it. But we have its exact parallel in Ἀνδροκλέα τέ τινα, τοῦ δήμου μάλιστα προεστῶτα, . . . ἀποκτείνουσιν (VIII. 65).

² Cp. *Knights*, 802-3, with Thucydides, V. 16.

A similar field for inconclusive argumentation is offered by a longer passage over which much ink has been shed (III. 84). The ancient scholiasts rejected this chapter as spurious, because of its difference from the author's usual style; and, following them, all German editors condemn it either wholly or in part. Dr. Thomas Arnold in his first edition devoted six earnest pages of close print to its defence: dismissing the opinions of the Scholiasts as of no weight—"it is a question on which we are as capable of judging as they"—scoffing at the idea that any Christian student could have displayed such a "union of political wisdom with so high and pure a tone of moral feeling"; and working himself up to an emphatic verdict: "I am fully persuaded that the 84th chapter was written by Thucydides." In his second edition, indeed, Arnold recanted, confessing that "he has learned to value more and more highly" the judgment of the ancient scholiasts, condemning as "caricatured in style" the very chapter which he had formerly defended with so much fervour, and adopting the idea he had formerly scouted, that it is "probably the work of some student of Thucydides living at Constantinople in Christian times." But he adhered to his estimate of its intrinsic quality as quite worthy of Thucydides.

Now, the very consideration which still disposed Arnold to favour this chapter is the one for which I would (so much are these questions of individual

judgment and taste) doubt its genuineness. Far from reflecting the wisdom and tone of Thucydides, it seems to me that it makes the greatest political writer a dreary prosier. After the subtle and vigorous chapters 82-83, where every sentence contains a thought, and almost every thought is as original as it is solid, it comes like an alien anti-climax. And that is not all. Consider how it is placed. Thucydides having related the Corcyraean sedition, goes aside to reflect, at some length, on the manifold effects of the revolutionary upheaval all over Greece. This brings us to the end of chapter 83, impressed and instructed, but also somewhat tired, and longing for the author to return to his story. Chapter 84 opens promisingly enough: "It was in Corcyra, then, that most of these deeds were first perpetrated"—one expects the author to resume his narrative. Instead, he plunges into a tirade about the depravity of human nature; the reader's irritation is equal to his surprise, and it is with no small relief that, after wading through this watery sermon, he lands at last on the firm ground of chapter 85, which begins, most properly, "Such, then, were the passions which the Corcyraeans in the city first displayed towards each other"—a natural transition from the philosophical analysis which preceded to the continuation of the story which follows. In fact, it looks as if chapter 85 originally came immediately after the end of chapter 83, and that chapter 84 was

interpolated—and so crudely too, that, were the whole of it left out, not only would there be no break, but, on the contrary, the sequence would be perfected. As to its style, it certainly presents some exaggeration of the faults which characterise many other passages, including chapters 82 and 83. Taking both matter and form into account, I should not be surprised to learn that the 84th chapter was written by a Christian grammarian. But here again I am unable to forget, first, that great writers have their uninspired moments, and, secondly, that the History is an unrevised composition, abounding in additions not very skilfully joined to the original text. Indeed, the undisguised artlessness of such insertions tells against the interpolation theory. Nor am I as convinced as was Dr. Rutherford, the greatest advocate of the theory in England, of the ubiquity “of that pestilent class of forgers who took up the more readily parodied sides of an author’s style and diction and used them against him.”¹ What I do know is that no forger can parody an author’s style so successfully as the author himself.

These few examples, which could easily be extended, will show the rashness of treating anything

¹ See *The Fourth Book of Thucydides*. By W. G. Rutherford LL.D. Intr. Dr. Rutherford, a disciple of Cobet’s, has done a useful service by calling attention to possible sources of corruption of which many students in this country either had never heard or did not wish to hear; and in the doing of it he has displayed equal learning and vigour. But he carried both his diagnosis and his remedy much too far.

as an interpolation merely because it departs from the writer's usual manner or interrupts the current of his narrative or the train of his thought, to the disturbance of the reader's ease. There can be no doubt that after drastic "editing" the History emerges stronger and purer. But an improvement is not necessarily a correction. In freeing the work from troublesome difficulties and irregularities we are not sure that the editor does not make us read, not what Thucydides wrote, but what he himself supposes that he may or ought to have written.

The same applies to all ancient writers, Greek and Latin alike. Many modern editors, assuming that they were in a position to state authoritatively what their author wrote and what he did not write, rushed into the text with pen drawn, bent upon veritable orgies of conjectural emendation. On reviewing the effects of their industry, the real benefit accomplished appears wonderfully disproportionate to the efforts exerted. The emendations which can fairly be called certain are rare. As a rule, one moves in a region of hypotheses ranging from more or less happy guess-work to probability; and not seldom one encounters results of learned ingenuity which he can only regard with dismay. Many "corrections" accepted for long years have had, in the light of ampler knowledge, to be replaced by the original readings. Hence the extreme reluctance of most English scholars to recognise that there is any

corruption, even when it stares us in the face, and their desperate defence of unintelligible passages by explanations sometimes not less unintelligible. It is, at all events, a safe attitude ; and if they have done little to smooth the reader's path, they have done nothing to create mistrust of their sanity. But conservatism also can be carried too far. Every unbiassed student of Thucydides realises that corruption of his text is no illusion. There are a number of passages where conjecture is only too necessary, and some few where emendation is convincing.¹

Such then are the causes to which the singularity of Thucydides' style has been ascribed : each view has its special pleader and each in turn acquires a vogue. What strikes the present writer is that none of these causes excludes the others : it takes more than a single thread to make a tangle. But when due allowance has been made for each and all of them, there still remains much in the Thucydidean

¹ I would instance Pluygers' masterly *ἐπὶ Στρέψαν* (I. 61), which removes some of the practical difficulties so acutely realised by Grote (*Hist. of Greece*, vol. iv. pp. 554-5, n.), and the argument in III. 12 from *εἰ γὰρ δυνατοὶ ἦμεν* to the end of the chapter, rendered intelligible only by Krüger's and Stahl's emendations. Besides passages like these, which cry out for correction, slighter errors here and there may be suspected. E.g. in V. 103, the MSS. reading (found also in Dionysius' quotation—*De Thuc. Hist. Jud.*, 40) *ἐπὶ ῥοπῆς μῖας*, "on a single turn (of the scale)," may very well hide a slip of the pen for *ἐπὶ ῥιπῆς μῖας*, "on a single throw (of the dice)." It seems to me most unlikely that Thucydides, who in the preceding sentence speaks of "those who throw for their all" (*ἀναρπιοτροῦσι*) would have gratuitously changed his metaphor.

manner of writing not explicable by any of them : a habitual awkwardness of expression which goes far beyond the bounds of eccentricity, which often reaches the limit of downright outlandishness. Anyone imbued with the spirit of the Greek language must feel this. Indeed, everyone so imbued has felt this. Dr. Rutherford, who considers Thucydides' "reputation for obscurity and clumsiness" as "undeserved" and who maintains that it is in no small measure due to "the thousand and one causes of corruption," yet, after having ruthlessly purged the text, finds himself constrained to admit "I never can quite get over a certain feeling of strangeness in some of the modes of expression," and recognises that "for Greeks themselves of a later date they seem not only to have appeared strange but even unintelligible."

That native Greeks should have been so mystified is in itself a circumstance significant enough ; it becomes still more significant when we know that the mystification was not confined to Greeks of a very late date—the Byzantine period—but was shared by their predecessors. The critic who has most severely animadverted on the "obscurity and clumsiness" of Thucydidean Greek lived as early as the first century B.C.—that is, before the copyists had had much time to contribute to a reputation already established, and, in Dionysius' judgment, amply deserved.

Of Dionysius as a critic in the higher acceptance of the term no one can have a poorer opinion than myself. When he criticises Thucydides' artistic quality, he simply betrays his own limitations, as much as when he finds fault with his historical method. But when he speaks of language—hypercritical though he often is—he speaks with the authority of a native, and a native, too, who had all the Greek writers of the age of Thucydides, as well as of the preceding and following ages, at his finger ends. Comparing it with the style of those writers, he pronounces the style of Thucydides, both in vocabulary and in grammar, unparalleled. He finds that it deviates not only from ordinary diction, but even more from ordinary construction: that it is full of “solecisms”—that it is not Greek of his own time which the historian writes, nor is it Greek of any other time before or after him—that it is, briefly, a language such as no Greek had ever written—and concludes that Thucydides invented this extraordinary language from an affected desire to differ from other writers.¹

This explanation may have satisfied Dionysius. But it does not satisfy us. The author of the History

¹ *De Thuc. Hist. Jud.*, 51. (Cp. *Thuc. Propr.* 2). This essay contains a passage suggesting that Dionysius, as a Greek, felt that the language which Thucydides uses, in the Speeches at all events, is such as no Greek could have used: “persons speaking in this way would be intolerably disgusting to their very mothers and fathers, who, even as hearing a foreign nation's tongue, would want someone to interpret.” (49).

is no literary acrobat bent upon astonishing the world with stylistic tricks. He is a serious-minded man treating public affairs with a profound sense of responsibility and with an anxious care that the reader shall follow him in every step. If therefore he uses a far-fetched style full of antiquated or novel expressions, if he uses familiar words in an unfamiliar way—if, in short, he deviates from the normal practice, we must conclude that he does so not from choice, but because he cannot help himself.

The reason why he cannot help himself may perhaps be found in certain facts which have always been accepted. The historian was closely connected with Thrace, where, to judge from the intimate knowledge of local conditions and customs displayed by his book, he spent much of his time, and where he enjoyed great influence amongst the leading men of the country. His reference to this fact has even been taken to mean that he reckoned himself one of them—even that he had some hereditary chieftainship ; which, I think, is straining his statement unduly. Tradition adds that he was of Thracian race and that he married a Thracian heiress. The first statement—whether it means that he was descended from a Thracian ancestor who obtained Athenian citizenship or from an Athenian citizen who took a Thracian wife—is supported by the name of his father. The second seems to be a surmise made to account for his

mining property—quite gratuitously, for Thucydides himself tells us that he only possessed the right of working the gold mines. But it is not unreasonable to believe that he owed this right to his Thracian connection.

Is it not possible that Thucydides owed to this Thracian connection more than a mining concession? The character of his mind, in its rigid attachment to essential, naked truth, and in its want of lightness and grace, strikes us as somewhat un-Greek. A similar impression, and to an even greater degree, we gain from the character of his speech. May it not be that he was born in Thrace, or at least passed his childhood there, so that Thracian was his vernacular and Greek an acquired tongue?¹ It seems more than a coincidence that the only other Greek work which resembles the History in obscurity and clumsiness was written by an Egyptian. The resemblance is so strong that I find two critics belonging to different ages making, quite independently, the same comment: Marcellinus says of Thucydides τῶν λέξεων οἱ νόες πλείονες—precisely the same as νοήμασι πλεονάζων ἢ λέξεσι, which Porphyry says of Plotinus: “he has more thoughts than words,”—and, he might have added, were he

¹ After writing the above I was pleased to read something to a like effect in Dr. Grundy's *Thucydides and the History of His Age*, p. 52, where ‘a great scholar and very learned man’ is reported to have said, “Thucydides’ Greek is at best good Thracian.” I readily follow the anonymous heretic, and only regret that he preceded me.

not speaking in praise, what words he has do not always seem to fit his thoughts.

To be sure, Thucydides could produce passages which for clearness and purity might be compared with the best examples of Attic prose. But, apparently, he could not do this without strenuous effort—or (one might almost fancy) external aid. Greek had not come to him by nature, and it remained to the end a foreign language. Hence that abnormality of expression which makes him, even more than his mentality, so peculiar among all the writers of Greece. If my hypothesis, which is put forward for what it is worth, does not explain the style of Thucydides, then, as Lord Chesterfield would have said, “where the devil he picked it up I cannot conceive.”

CHAPTER XII

A POSSESSION FOR EVER

Its literary defects have not prevented the History of Thucydides from securing a literary immortality ; for they are mostly such as any competent literary artisan (of whom there are many), armed with full powers and a pencil, could set right. Although they disfigure, they do not weaken the edifice or detract from its massive grandeur. We know of books which are episodically magnificent, but in the sum are of inferior quality. With this writer's work the opposite holds true. The higher gifts which he commands, the splendour of his imagination, the depth and range of his thought, above all the power of centralising many talents to a single purpose, are excellences such as only few can hope to emulate.

You realise the quality of Thucydides on going from him to his continuator. Xenophon's style flows easily, always clear, always graceful. His pages are quite free from those obscurities, tortuosities and incoherences which so frequently exasperate us in Thucydides, and abound with scenes and portraits which linger in the memory.

There are few more graphic touches in ancient literature than the passage in which Xenophon describes the terror that seized Athens when, one night, the despatch boat *Paralus* brought the report of the utter catastrophe at Aegospotami: "a wail from the Piræus ran along up to the city, as man passed the news to man; and no one slept that night, but all spent it weeping, not only for those who had perished, but much more for themselves"—or the passage in which he tells how, when the Athenian ambassadors sent to sue for peace were returning home, the starving crowd "poured round them fearful lest they should have come back empty-handed"—or his account of the demolition of the Long Walls "to the music of flute-girls"—or his pen-sketch of Theramenes the trimmer who "fitted either party, as a buskin seems to fit either foot—and looks away from both." It is all very pretty and admirable. But through it all one misses the mind of the great writer.

When Lord Chatham gave special instructions that his son William Pitt should read Thucydides at College, he testified to the value of the historian as a teacher of statesmanship. But it may well be doubted whether any young man, even if his name were William Pitt, could realise the value of Thucydides. "A young man, whatever his genius may be, is no judge of such a writer as Thucydides," said Macaulay. "I had no high opinion of him ten

years ago. I have now been reading him with a mind accustomed to historical researches and to political affairs ; and I am astonished at my own former blindness, and at his greatness." The observation is perfectly just. Thucydides' appeal is an appeal to mature minds.

And not to all mature minds. It is plain that Thucydides made no appeal—or only a disagreeable one—to the late Professor Mahaffy. He found the historian severe—and he suspected him of being surly. His criticism reveals a want of sympathy which closer acquaintance would doubtless have intensified. It is instructive—far more than a conventional eulogy would have been ; for it is sincere and spontaneous : a genuine case of incompatibility of temperament. Hardly less unfortunate appears to be Professor Gilbert Murray in his picture of Thucydides as a passionate patriot lamenting over Athens, " the old mistress of his love dead and buried." It all rests on a preconception, and, if I may say so, a misconception. It does not fit in with the man's character as revealed by an objective study of his book ; and there is not a particle of external evidence to lend it plausibility. The same may be said of Dr. Thomas Arnold's fixed idea of Thucydides as an earnest preacher of morality—a man who would have done infinite credit to the Doctor, had he been educated at Rugby under his tuition. Arnold was not alone in this strange

delusion. The German scholar Classen, who devoted his life to the worship of Thucydides, in order, apparently, to justify to himself his devotion, reduces Thucydides to the level of a Lutheran pastor.

Thus some find in Thucydides things which are not there, while others complain of not finding in him things which their prepossessions make them think should be there. This lack of understanding is probably due to the unusual simplicity of his nature. It is easy enough to understand a passion, a mission, or a pose ; but a man who simply says what he really sees, and sees it unilluded, will often escape comprehension. Thucydides is too devoid of atmosphere for either the patriot or the artist or the moralist to feel at home—to satisfy the conditions which their souls crave, he must be recreated in conformity with their own mental cast.

There is beauty in romance ; but a grander beauty in stark, ruthless, uncompromising verity. This is the kind of beauty that the singularly proud and reserved author of the *History* discloses : a rare character, assuredly, but by no means an isolated phenomenon. Its replica is to be found among brain-workers the world over ; though seldom among those of whom the world hears.

What part in life's drama did Fate assign to Thucydides ? What could a man of this type do in such times as his lot fell in ? There is a haunting

phrase in his book : τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἔργον
—to know everything is to do nothing. In penning
it he might have been thinking of himself.

Vague reports have come down to us of his supposed activities—they have long been discredited. Except for the few scraps already noted, the man seems to have left no trace of his passage across the stage. The world in which he lived knew very little of him. His aloofness of mind and character, while it saved him from becoming involved in the meshes of vulgar party intrigue, also prevented him from exerting any influence on his country's affairs. His ambitions and his aptitudes lay not in that direction. Others might strive for power ; his business was to see, and to speak, the truth. Hence the impersonal, almost casual, allusion to the episode which ruined his public career, and the prodigious labour he lavished on the production of his book.

A book of this sort—so grave in its tone, so sane in its spirit, so singular in its detachment from the passions which agitate the souls of ordinary men, so indifferent to sentiment, so merciless in its calm exposure of human folly—how could such a book be popular ? We may well believe that it was damned before it was born. What little attention the History attracted in its own day was confined to historians and was immediately followed by a neglect amounting almost to oblivion. Thucydides

had anticipated this reception when he wrote in his preface that the unromantic character of his narrative might not be very pleasing to the ear. But he had also anticipated the ultimate verdict when he described it as "a possession for ever."

It is a sound remark of Professor Jebb's that the phrase "a possession for ever" has a more definite import than any mere anticipation of abiding fame; that it refers to the permanent value of the lessons which the History contains. For, though Thucydides has no didactic purpose in the narrow sense of the term, though he avoids direct instruction, he tells us expressly that he intends his book to be useful. A thousand opinions may be formed about the meaning which he attached to this word—military, political, ethical. But, although it teaches many lessons, the History is not written to enforce any particular lesson. Thucydides lets his story tell itself in the deeds and words of those who act it out. He must therefore have meant that it is the thing itself which will have use and value for all time. This is not to say, of course, that he confines himself to a mere report. Beside the narrator stands the thinker, explaining the facts by causes and reasons, exposing the principles which underlie them. But he does not use the facts to illustrate a thesis, much less does he manipulate them to fit a doctrine of his own. His philosophy waits upon the facts and does not govern them.

The event has justified him. However little contemporaries may have thought of the History, it has been valued beyond price by posterity. The main reason has already been given : it does not convey an individual's theory about the facts : a theory which may command admiration and applause until its limitations are found out. The History of Thucydides is not limited by the author's personality more than is humanly inevitable. But that is not all. Many historians have flourished and faded for another reason. They were limited by the fashions of their respective periods, and as each period outgrows the one that precedes it, the master who is admired and applauded one day finds few pupils the next : he falls out of date. Thucydides does not suffer from this limitation either. The ephemeral has little or no place in him. He takes his inspiration not from fashion, but from life ; and life is never out of date.

And so it comes about that, while Thucydides did not put forward any claim to imperishable fame, Time the supreme arbiter has established it. His authority endures, unimpaired by changes in literary taste or academic doctrine. His practice puts all creeds to shame, and questions whether history is a science or whether it is an art lose their pertinence in sight of his performance. Those among us who are least in sympathy with the writer's temper feel constrained to do homage to the force of his intellect ;

while those who approach him predisposed to receive what he has to give part from him abashed by his wisdom: he seems to have penetrated into the inmost recesses of the human heart—to have left nothing relating to the eternal strife of man with man unprobed and unexplained. Wherefore scholars still admire, even though they may not always understand, and statesmen still use, the History which Thucydides the Athenian wrote two thousand and three hundred years ago.

Yet we cannot speak of that History as exercising any influence at all commensurate with its greatness. Thucydides has, indeed, introduced habits of thought, modes of reasoning, methods of inquiry, even forms of expression, which have been communicated to the more popular writers until they have become commonplace. But it is one thing to draw upon a master, quite another to adopt his attitude. This presupposes a spirit which cannot be communicated—which, in the nature of things, can never have a following except among the few.

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